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BAGRATION

THE HONOUR AND GLORY
OF 1812

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Translated
by
J. Fineberg

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The common mode of address in Russia is by name and patronymic. Thus, if a man's name is Peter and his father's name is Ivan he will be addressed as Peter Ivanovich. Boris, the son of Peter, will be addressed as Boris Petrovich. In the case of feminine names the patronymic assumes the ending of "ovna." If a lady's name is Anna and her father's is Peter, she will be addressed as Anna Petrovna. Nina, the daughter of Ivan, will be addressed as Nina Ivanovna, etc.

Children, young persons and intimates are usually addressed by diminutive names. Thus, Alexander will be Sasha, Alexei—Alyosha, Sergei—Seryozha, Paul—Pavlusha (in this story Bagrattion endearingly calls Paul Muratov, Pavlishche, because of his burly figure).

The common mode of address has been retained in the translation of this book. Readers are requested to take note of this in order not to confuse the characters.

Easy victories do not rejoice a Russian's heart

SUVOROV

CHAPTER ONE

THE sun was setting, red, like the glowing embers of a campfire. And as it sank below the horizon it cast a ruddy glare over the camp of Viceroy Eugene's 4th Italian Corps, situated on the hills, at the foot of which quietly flowed the broad Niemen. The river flowed on a level with its banks, past wide expanses of golden corn fields, brown patches of newly ploughed land and green meadows. But just now the entire landscape—the camp, the hills, the Niemen and its banks—was tinted a deep pink by the ruddy glare of the setting sun.

Massimo Battaglia, Lieutenant of the Light Horse Guards was sitting on a tree stump near a cottage, the quarters of the Viceroy and of General Junot, Duke d'Abrantes, commander of the 8th Westphalian Corps, which was following in the rear of the Italians to the Niemen with the intention of crossing. The aide-de-camp's hat which the young officer wore had slipped over his ear. His handsome face and black eyes expressed sadness and perplexity. He had just read—probably for the twentieth time—a letter he had received from his elder brother Silvio, who lived in Russia. He had received it in Milan, many months ago. Had it not been for the dark shadows which had fallen with the setting of the sun he might have gone on reading and re-reading this strange and somewhat disturbing epistle. Whatever made him take it with him in this distant, northern campaign? The devil knows! . . . He carefully folded the letter, put it into his inside pocket and whispered with a sigh:

"May I be hanged like a cat for a soldier's target if I understand what's happening to poor Silvio! Either he has become as wise as Aristotle and I as stupid as a bunch of radishes. . . . Or. . . ."

Massimo Battaglia sank into a deep reverie. Meanwhile, night was falling. A faint light pervaded the translucent sky. It really could not be called night. It was a pale twilight, so pale that the outlines of objects remained quite distinct, except that the objects themselves seemed to sway slightly in the dusk. This impression was heightened by the smoke that was rising from innumerable bivouac fires and spreading over the camp like a fine veil.

Numerous waggons were rolling down to the river bank drawn by immense horses harnessed two abreast, in teams of six, carting loads of material to the places where bridges were being built across the Niemen. The pontoons were already in position, bobbing up and down in great agitation, as if trying to tear themselves from the water and float over the river. And this agitation was communicated to the men who were anxiously watching the progress of this formidable operation. All night long troops—infantry and cavalry, artillery and baggage—marched to the Niemen in serried ranks, filling the air with muffled sounds as motley and impressive as the martial beauty of the soldiers' uniforms, horses, banners and weapons.

Next morning the sun rose in a brilliant halo, and once again lit up the magnificent panorama of yesterday, radiant with all the colours of the rainbow. But this did not last long. Soon, the golden fields thickly dotted with blue cornflowers spreading on the other side of the river were shrouded by a mist. Then the camp was enveloped in fog, acrid, like smoke, causing one to cough. The parched earth attracted the night clouds to suck the moisture from them, slowly and deliberately. Gradually the fog dispersed. The pall rose higher and higher until the sun beamed over the camp again. But light white clouds, like tufts of combed wool, still hung in the sky. "How changeable the weather is today," thought Massimo Battaglia to himself. "Like a hostess trying on gown after gown, unable to make up her mind in which to meet her guests." But the thought had scarcely flashed through his mind when the dazzling brilliance of the morning was again extinguished. White clouds, like cobwebs, spread across the sky and blotted out the sun. For a time its rays managed to pierce the veil here and there, and their light poured down like golden ducats from a hole in a money bag. At midday this too ceased. A vast grey cloud hovered over the camp. The still air was murky and heavy.

The sounds of martial music were wafted across the hills and woods. Viceroy Eugene and General Junot stood peering through their spyglasses. The crossing of the river had commenced. The pontoon bridges bounced like huge corks under the endless stream of troops marching across them. The silver trumpets of the Guards Division gleamed dully over the water, the fiery red pennants of the Uhlans fluttered slowly at their lance heads, the bearskins of the Grenadiers marching in serried ranks looked like taut, black threads, and guns and ammunition carts rumbled and clattered over the bridge. The soldiers were dressed as if for parade. They looked vigorous and brave.

"It is magnificent, Duke," said the Viceroy vivaciously turning to Junot. "Like a Sunday parade outside the Tuileries Palace, in Paris, in the presence of the Emperor. What?"

Junot's stern soldierly face darkened in a frown. Yes, it was like a parade in Paris; but, devil take it, something was lacking! What was it? Junot frowned again and said:

"The soldiers are not cheerful, Your Highness. . . . They are not singing!"

Indeed, everything that combined to produce the martial symphony of that day was heard: the rumbling of the wheels of the guns and baggage carts, the neighing of the horses, the commands of the officers and the shouting of the drivers. But . . . there was no spirit in it. There was no cheering, no singing, no elation at the prospect of battle. Twenty-five thousand Italians—the Guards and the Infantry Division commanded by General Pinot—crossed the Niemen in perfect order, but Junot's keen eyes were not deceived by the splendour of the scene, and his experienced ear confirmed his observations.

"It would be as hard to make them sing now as to compel a hundred devils to dance on the point of a needle," he said.

* * *

A group of staff officers, engaged in animated conversation, was joined by the favourite of the Army, of the Viceroy, and of the Emperor himself—the dashing Colonel Guglielmino celebrated both for his courage and love of fun.

"This scene, gentlemen, makes me feel that I have history tightly clasped in my fist!" he said, butting into the conversation. "I swear by the Holy Ghost—history is right here!" In saying this he struck the palm of his right hand with the forefinger of his left. "His Highness, Prince Eugene has just received information that Davout's 1st Corps, Oudinot's 2nd Corps, Ney's 3rd Corps, King Murat with Nansouty's and Montbrun's cavalry, Mortier's, Lefebvre's and Bessières' Guards and, lastly, the Emperor with General Headquarters all crossed the Niemen near Kovno on the morning of the 24th without any difficulty, and that Macdonald's 10th Corps crossed at Tilsit. . . ."

The officers crowded round the speaker eager to hear the news.

"Oudinot has defeated the Russian rearguard near Vilkomir, and King Jerome has dislodged Platov's Cossacks from Grodno. There can be no doubt that the Emperor has dislodged the rearguard of General Barclay's Army from Vilna and has occupied the town. He will wait there until the baggage has drawn up and we—the right flank of the *Grande Armée*—have crossed. . . ."

"I swear by the sails of St. Peter's boat that the Emperor will not have to wait long!" exclaimed brave Captain Delfante, interrupting the speaker. "Tomorrow morning we shall be on the Russian bank. . . ."

"Why, of course!" Guglielmino responded, "and this Russian bear hunt will end no more than a month from now, and we shall divide its skin!

May St. Ambrose show me a fico if it does not turn out as I say. . ." With this he broke into a hearty laugh, in which he was joined by Delfante and the other officers. Then followed a rapid interchange of quips and jests, some very apt and some not, but all rather coarse and merry.

"Battaglia. . . ." continued the Colonel in his bantering tone, wiping the tears from his eyes with a scented handkerchief, "you are a splendid officer! Ha-ha-ha! But why, my friend, do you look . . . ha-ha-ha! . . . like a horse which has eaten too large a portion of oats? Ha-ha-ha!"

Massimo raised his head. He did, indeed, look very much down in the mouth, but he could not help it. He was depressed by the gloomy thoughts roused by his brother's letter. His heart was heavy and his face showed it. Still, he was piqued by the Colonel's banter.

"Don't laugh, Colonel!" he retorted sharply.

"Why not?"

"This is a great day!"

* * *

"What's that? Gunfire?"

Everybody strained their ears. Dull thuds were heard quite distinctly. It was not gunfire, however, but thunder, which drew rapidly nearer, the claps became more deafening every moment. Two clouds crept up from the East, one grey and the other black. The first emitted pale flashes of zigzag lightning; the second, every now and again, lit up the sky with a red glare. And then the storm burst. The camp was enveloped in gloom, which was pierced by flashes of lightning with ever increasing frequency. The thunder roared louder and louder. Suddenly a white flash of blinding brilliance struck the Niemen and its hilly banks, and the clap of thunder that immediately followed it gave the impression that the very heavens had fallen. Then the clouds burst, the black one releasing a torrent of rain, and the grey an avalanche of hail.

The clamour and clatter spread through the camp and reached the river crossing. The horses broke from their tethers and stampeded in all directions. Their riders caught them and tried to turn them tail towards the storm, but the horses reared, snorted and pressed their ears back in terror, and taking the bits between their teeth galloped into the storm. The hail poured down furiously, at first painfully pricking the face and hands like powdered glass, but soon growing into fair-sized pebbles, falling in increasing density until they rattled down in an icy avalanche with terrific force. Frightful gusts of wind upset the musket stacks and tents. The roads were swept by raging torrents, and the fields were nothing but turbulent lakes.

Wrapped in his cloak, Massimo spent the whole night pressing against the thick trunk of an enormous pine tree. When day broke he saw horses plunging and falling in the thick mud that had formed all over the camp. Oaths and cries of anger and pain were heard on all sides. The gale, cold like the breath of the Arctic, still howled and moaned when the first streaks of dawn appeared in the murky sky. The soldiers were drenched to the skin, frozen, exhausted and hungry, and looked for all the world like shipwrecked sailors. They cursed the hailstones, which struck and bruised them. Some had bumps on their heads, others were bleeding at the temples. Many had the emblems on their helmets battered or the spikes bent. The Italians were superstitious and every untoward incident filled them with apprehension. The baggage carts were stuck in the mud—that meant hunger. Thousands of horses had perished in the mud and water—how were they to advance further? The heavens flickered threateningly with the last white flashes of lightning, as if warning the newcomers not to be too precipitous. And all this was happening just when they were setting foot on the soil of a distant, hostile and enigmatic land! A bad omen!

* * *

It was almost light when Massimo Battaglia, with an escort of five cavalrymen, left the camp mounted on a splendid raven steed from Prince Eugene's own stables. The mission on which the Viceroy had sent him exceeded in importance anything a young aide-de-camp could dream of. He was to proceed post-haste to Vilna and hand to the Emperor Napoleon in person the report that the Italian Corps had crossed the Niemen near the township of Polonna, and return with the Emperor's orders . . . "with a shield, or on a shield!" as the Romans used to say. That is how careers are made! For a kind glance from the Emperor, for a word or a smile from him, men were willing to pay with their heads. . . .

Strangely enough, try as he would, these thoughts failed to cheer Massimo; his heart became no lighter. Was it because the envelope containing the Viceroy's despatches lay next to his brother's letter in the inside pocket of his coat? Passing through the camp he had met acquaintances at every step, and with their livid faces and bedraggled moustaches these officers had cut very miserable figures. They were, no doubt, aware of this, for they hesitated to look each other in the face. A sad departure!

The Lieutenant whipped up his horse and galloped out onto the road, which was full of puddles, and his horse's hoofs sent up fountains of black mud. For some reason Massimo felt an intense desire to turn back. He pictured to himself the cottage on the hill . . . the sombre, pale, but handsome face of the Viceroy . . . the disgruntled frown on Junot's coarse, soldierly face. . . . The two are discussing last night's storm.

"A bad omen!" says the Duke, shaking his head. "Yes, the Romans would have offered sacrifices to propitiate their gods," answers the Viceroy.

Massimo Battaglia viciously struck his horse's head with the handle of his whip. The horse reared and then dashed forward. The horseman struck it again, again and again. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

A cluster of tumbledown huts amidst boundless swamps and pinewoods. On a sandy hill loom the grey outlines of a deserted castle, the grounds overgrown with tall rank grass. An old, dilapidated, log-built monastery perched on the edge of the steep bank of the Dnieper. Such was the town of Mir, near which Prince Bagrattion's Second Army had bivouacked for the night. In the pale blue light of the moonlit summer night the town looked less wretched and miserable than it did in day time.

The General Staff of the Army had taken up its quarters in a suburban tavern—a large, filthy hut, with an earthen floor. Long forms ranged against the walls, a grimy deal table and a bed carelessly covered with straw, constituted the meagre furniture of the large room. On the bed, with his legs crossed under him, sat a young red-haired officer in a short campaign coat instead of a gown. Near him, in an earthenware jar, a tallow candle burned, and alongside of it there was a bowl filled with potatoes which the officer took one by one and munched slowly, deep in thought. On the forms around the walls, their heads thrown back, slept the Commander-in-Chief's adjutants and orderlies. Their snoring was echoed by the wind which hummed and whistled a wild melody through the cracks and crevices of the walls.

Who, six months ago, would have pictured Lieutenant Muratov of the Life Guards Chasseur Regiment—scion of an ancient and wealthy family famous throughout Russia, a young man, newly wed, with a brilliant future—in his present strange surroundings? A sleepless night on straw. . . . Potatoes for supper. . . . But this was only the beginning! What will it be like later? Muratov drew a sheet of paper from the cuff of his coat and read in a low voice:

YOUTH

Alien are we to apprehension.
Bold the flight of our imagination.
Free and wide our wings are spread.
Youth never looks ahead. . . .

These four lines pleased him, but try as he would he could go no further. He pushed the sheet of paper aside with vexation and rubbed his tired eyes, round and yellow like those of a large wildcat. After all, things were going fine. At last his dream had come true. The dawn of every day of his new life was heralded by the sound of trumpets, the firing of cannon and the neighing of horses. Flanking movements, assaults, galloping across open fields, the jolly puffs of smoke from the muskets and the exciting skirmishes of the Chasseurs—was it not enough to thrill one's heart and make one wild with joy? And how remote seemed the danger of death! War was wonderful—honour, patriotism and glorious sacrifice! What did the soldier lack for complete bliss? No feat was too hard for him to perform. He had only to will it. He pictured himself as General Muratov, the saviour of his country, leading Napoleon captive into St. Petersburg. The villain, raving in an iron cage, gnashes his teeth in impotent rage and emits showers of sparks, like the mountebank he saw in the Haymarket last Shrovetide. The sparks crackle and splutter like hair when singed, and Napoleon's teeth chatter with a drumming sound like potatoes emptied from a sack. Ah! Canaille! You will not escape! Muratov rushes to the cage—but a savoury smell strikes his nostrils. Why, it's the soldiers grilling pork over the campfire. . . . Fine! So we shall have a savoury and filling supper after all! But the sparks crackle and the potatoes drop, drumming. . . .

"Wake up, my boy! Hey! Wake up, you rascal!"

The Commander in-Chief shook the Lieutenant by the shoulder. Muratov jumped from the bed and stood at attention, blushing and blinking his eyes in confusion. The bowl was on the floor, the potatoes scattered in all directions. The auburn curls which had clustered so profusely round the young aide-de-camp's forehead were sadly depleted; they had been badly singed by the candle over which his head had drooped when he fell asleep. The Commander-in-Chief shook his head reproachfully and said slowly:

"Those who lie in the arms of Morpheus by candle light must take care not to catch fire. There are some ancient stanzas to this effect; they must have been written about you, brother. If you sleep on duty again, Sir, I shall make you smart for it! I shall give it to you hot and strong!"

Muratov blushed still more deeply. Now that he was standing upright it could be seen that he was very tall—six feet three if an inch—and, as if trying to diminish his bulk, he stooped slightly. Bagrattion walked slowly round the room and stopped at the table, which was heaped with papers. The fact that his speech and movements were unhurried, even languid, encouraged Muratov; it showed that his wrath had blown over. Everybody knew what Bagrattion's wrath was like—it came like a flash of lightning and thundered with the fury of a sudden storm. "Thank God!" Notwithstanding the embarrassment caused by the consciousness of his guilt, Muratov gazed with admiration at the General, at his proud bearing and soldierly face. It was two o'clock in the morning. . . . When does he sleep? Does he ever sleep? Bagrattion wore his habitual coat with his Star and his General's cocked hat. His riding whip was flung across his shoulder, and his sword, the gift of Suvorov, hung at his side. Muratov had seen him in this costume day and night, from the moment the war began and the Army set out on the march. Did he ever undress?

"What's the news, my heart?" Bagrattion enquired, addressing Muratov in his customary affectionate manner.

"A very important and confidential package has been received from the Minister for War, Your Excellency, but there is no urgency mark on the envelope. There are no feathers on the seal."*

"From the Minister? Open the package. That's right. Give it here. Bring the candle nearer. Ah-a-a-a!"

As Bagrattion read, his fine, open features consecutively expressed first surprise, then pleasure, and, at last, simple-hearted joy. Muratov eagerly watched every change of expression like a lover furtively watching the charming ingenuousness of his beloved. It is common knowledge that General Headquarters in all the armies in the world are always filled with idlers and windbags of all ranks who weave intrigues around their superiors, but there was nothing like this at General Headquarters of the Second Army. From the Adjutant General down to the last escort Cossack, all were devoted heart and soul to their Commander-in-Chief and considered it a privilege to execute his orders. This was the case at Headquarters. As for the army units, the men were prepared literally to go through fire and water at Bagrattion's command. There was scarcely another General in the Russian Army who made his subordinates feel his power less than Bagrattion and yet had as much command over them.

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* The seal on urgent despatches bore two crossed feathers.

After perusing the document sent him by the War Minister, General Barclay de Tolly, Prince Peter Ivanovich* stood motionless for several minutes in silent reflection. Then, turning to Muratov and placing his hand on his mighty shoulders, he asked him:

"Do you love me, my heart?"

The Lieutenant started. Did he love Bagrattion? Muratov usually spoke slowly, but fluently, in a slightly sing-song manner, drawling in the Moscow fashion; but when he was agitated his words came in gusts; and on this occasion too, instead of answering at once, he stood with his mouth open and eyes bulging for several seconds and suddenly blurted out:

"As my own life, Your Highness!"

Bagrattion smiled.

"Life? Yes, one must love it. You are married only a twelvemonth, is that not so?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"To Olferyev's sister?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Happy man, Pavlishche! Look at the beau I am. I don't know whether I am married or not. My wife is in Vienna, dilly-dallying with the Austrian Ministers, while I am here risking my life against Bonaparte and his half-witted father-in-law.** What do you think of that, eh?"

It often happens that the profound respect one entertains for one's hero somewhat dampens the ardour of one's attachment to him, but the warm and respectful sympathy with which Muratov listened to the friendly and frank words uttered by Bagrattion showed that this was not the case with him.

"Thirty years of military service . . . twenty-three of which I have spent in the field. . . . Do you know what the wives of men like myself are?"

The Prince remained silent for a moment and then continued:

"Our wives are loaded muskets, that's what they are! You write verse, Pavlishche. Well, brother, write a sonnet about the wives and sisters of us soldiers. Eh? What are our sisters? Try, try hard, my heart. . . ."

Thus prompted, Muratov blurted out on the spur of the moment:

"Our sisters are our sabres keen,
Our grandsires ever brave have been.
Our. . . ."

"Bravo! Splendid, my heart! I can see you becoming a second . . . Karamzin! *** I'm fond of you, Pavlishche! You and your brother-in-law Olferyev — I like you better than all the rest. Take this epistle from the Minister for War as a keepsake from me. Take it, brother, it's amusing, but not trivial. Above all, there is nothing in it that is untrue. Truth is man's finest monument. Isn't it wonderful how big things suddenly spring up out of trifles? The other day Barclay's Cossacks killed an Italian courier, and among the documents found on him was this letter, written about me, by my hired man, also an Italian, to his brother in Milan. It is a sincere letter, and he says pleasant things about me. And so the Minister, without more ado, sends it to me to prove how kind he is. Sly Minister! But Prince Peter is no ass. . . ."

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* Bagrattion.

** The salon of Princess E. P. Bagrattion, née Countess Skavronskaya, was the centre of anti-Russian political intrigue in Europe. Napoleon's father-in-law was the Austrian Emperor Francis I.

*** Famous Russian poet and historian of that period.

Bagrattion laughed heartily.

"Take it as a keepsake, my heart. You and Olferyev are in the secret. To the others—not a word!"

One of the officers lying on a form near the wall yawned loudly, turned on his side, and catching sight of the Commander-in-Chief, noisily sprang to his feet.

"Good morning, Your Excellency!"

"Olferyev! My heart! Have you not had enough sleep yet?"

The door creaked and opened slowly. On the threshold stood the short, extremely graceful figure of a young, dapper General with fine, dark, curly hair. He bowed politely. It was a short, quick, barely discernible movement, but performed with all the grace for which the former Court of Versailles was famous. The benevolent smile on Bagrattion's face faded away. His face darkened and assumed an unpleasant expression.

"Ah, here is Monsieur the Chief of Staff," he said coldly. "Good morning, Count."

* * *

On being relieved by Olferyev, Muratov prepared to turn in, but before doing so he told Olferyev of the gift he had received from Bagrattion. Two heads bent low over Battaglia's letter—an enormous one, with a shock of hair like a sheaf of ripe corn, and the other, very fair, with the hair combed wavily over the temples.

"Now that the smoke of the bivouac fires has enveloped Europe like the black fog of the Middle Ages," said Olferyev, "the Italian language is the most appropriate in which to sing the praises of our commander. I have read Tasso in the original, and so I shall be able to get through this letter in a trice. You, Paul, take the translation. And so: 'To Signor Massimo Battaglia, Second Lieutenant of the Light Mounted Velite Regiment of the Italian Royal Guards, in the City of Milan. . . .'"

The two heads bent still lower.

CHAPTER THREE

The Letter of E. S. Battaglia

My dear brother,

It is exactly twelve years since I last embraced you and Aunt Bobbina. This was on leaving Milan, at the Porta Vercelli, near the grey-stone cabin where our father had his smithy. I swear by the Holy Trinity that I have forgotten nothing. And today, looking back into the past, I again see the tears running down my little brother's pale, smooth cheeks.

I left my country and abandoned my dear ones in order to save them from cruel want and, perhaps, death from starvation. There was no other way out. On the night before I left I turned my pockets inside out and found only a few miserable soldi and centesimi. In the house there was nothing but a piece of Christmas sausage and a jar of fat melted down from tallow candles. . . . In the San Vittorio vineyard we had only a quarter of a portica for the entire family. . . . What else could I do? I went to Russia.

Twelve years—this is a very, very long time. . . . The smithy at the Porta Vercelli has tumbled down long ago. Aunt Bobbina no longer sells martins in the market-place. Since her younger nephew became the aide-de-camp of the Viceroy of Italy such an occupation is no longer fitting for her. This is all I know about you both, Massimo. But you know even less about me. You want to hear something about me. Well, listen, my dear brother.

Two brothers—two destinies. In our father's smithy we both became accustomed to hardship and poverty and learned to go without. I remained in that state. You, however, made more progress, and now you are teaching your brave soldiers patiently to bear pain, privation and danger. You worship no other divinity than the Conqueror of Europe,* you recognize no right other than his might, you feel no other passion than that of achieving fame with him. I am addressing you, an honoured and gallant soldier, in the plain terms of a brother, without mentioning any of your pompous titles. Do I not err in doing so? Will it be humiliating for you to learn that your elder brother is still only a valet? Will you not be vexed by his now misplaced familiarity? Yes, my dear Massimo. I am still, indeed, what I was in the past and have no desire to be anything else. Experience has proved to me the indubitable advantages of a humble walk of life, and I have profound respect for those who worthily pursue it. Since 1799 I have been the faithful servant of my Russian master, and I find in this state nothing but honour. To make this clear to you I can quote numerous facts: my master's brilliant military career is known throughout the world. He is kind, noble, tireless in industry and fearless in the midst of danger. His vices are far more winning than the virtues of which men usually boast. And lastly, he is the great grandson of Yessei, King of Karthli; hence his birth is as illustrious as that of the King of the Two Sicilies, or, at all events, the Duke of Tuscany. All this is the plain, unvarnished truth, but still it fails to satisfy my valet-de-chambre's vanity, and so I must tell you what happened yesterday. I doubt whether there is a less skilled narrator than I, but that does not matter. I will endeavour to make up for my deficiency in this art by accurate description, and I think I shall succeed in throwing some light on the character and spirit of my hero. Then, in the aureole of his greatness, you will be able to discern the depth from which springs the joy of my duty and devotion—a devotion which restrains the old servant Enea Silvio Battaglia from desiring a less humble destiny. . . .

. . . For about three days my master has been staying with his relatives and friends on their estate in Simi, situated at no great distance from the city of Vladimir. Picture to yourself a vast white mansion with a lofty roof and a broad colonnade arranged in two terraces, standing in a garden smothered in roses and jasmine. On the bright green lawn glistening in the brilliant summer sun stand marble statues of the ancient gods. Beyond the garden are visible the glittering waters of an oval pond marking the entrance to a vast, century-old park of oak and lime. It seems to me that to measure this park in Italian toises we should require all the numbers of arithmetic, and even that would not suffice. In Simi there are numerous farms, and a large stud farm. Here I saw a very important-looking English horse trainer, gigantic Newfoundland dogs, agricultural machines, and even a complicated arrangement for irrigating clover fields. . . .

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* Napoleon Bonaparte.

This wealth is owned by that venerable and aged aristocrat, Prince Golitsin, a man of merry disposition, with a smiling, purely Russian, benevolent face.* His spouse is the aunt of my master. Like her nephew, she, too, is of royal blood.** Never in my life have I seen such luxury as that in which we are living now. A double flight of broad steps leads to the house. Beyond the vestibule, the pantries and the dining-room there is a long vista of halls with wide-flung portals—ball-rooms, reception-rooms, drawing-rooms and conservatories. Crystal chandeliers hang from gilded ceilings, the walls are lined with glittering, gilt-framed mirrors, and fine porcelain vases shimmer in rosy light. Beautiful portraits of the host's ancestors gaze thoughtfully from their splendid frames. Everything here is designed to make life comfortable, carefree and beautiful. But this palace was built and furnished many years ago. Here and there the parquetting of the floor is cracked. The film of time lies like a veil of fine grey dust upon many of the objects, and the cut glass and silver drinking vessels on the sideboards are dark, like topaz. The plush, bronze and marble have also lost their original lustre and tint, and there is something strange in the atmosphere that pervades these chambers. A mixture of ennui, cosiness and benignity.

We arrived in Simi the day before yesterday. And yesterday, from early morning, carriages, coaches, faetons, gigs and other equipages began to roll up to the house in an almost uninterrupted train. Who in Russia does not know my master, whose name is famous for great military exploits? And so, prompted by a common impulse of patriotic fervour, the surrounding nobility—famous and obscure, rich and poor, young and old, ladies and gentlemen—hastened to pay their respects to him. The liveried footmen with powdered hair and in low shoes barely managed to escort the guests to the house, so fast did they arrive. By the evening Simi had the appearance of a noisy little town.

Immediately on my arrival I struck up a fairly close friendship with Karelin, the Major Domo of this house (in Russian they are called *dvoretsky*). Karelin is old, bald, of very slight build. He wears a long brown coat and is very fond of snuff, which he keeps in a black lacquered snuff-box with a landscape painted on the lid. He is extremely talkative. He is not, usually, overburdened with duties, for in Simi everything is conducted according to long-established routine and seems to run of its own accord. Actually, Karelin's main function is to prepare the Princess's morning coffee, and he does this with superb artistry. But yesterday, with so many guests arriving, the poor old man nearly dropped from fatigue. Incidentally, the host himself was kept no less busy.

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* Prince Boris Andreyevich Golitsin (1760—1822).

** Princess Anna Alexandrovna Golitsina, née Princess Gruzinskaya (1763—1842).

Amidst this festive bustle I alone was quite free and had full opportunity to observe my master and his aunt. My master is not tall, but handsomely proportioned, and presents a picture of beauty and grace—broad shoulders, a slender waist as graceful as that of a maiden's, and a light and confident step. Add to this his manly, swarthy face, dark, flashing eyes, eagle nose, and his curly hair, the colour of a raven's wing, forming a ruffled crown for his proud and noble head. If you picture all this to yourself, you will obtain a portrait of Prince Peter Ivanovich Bagrattion. He is merry in company, fluent of speech, admires wit without malice and maintains that noble simplicity and bluntness of address that is characteristic only of the soldier. So he was yesterday—indifferent to obsequiousness and responsive to every sincere word uttered amidst the loud chorus of compliment and rapturous praise.

Entirely unlike him is Princess Golitsina. She is tall, of austere countenance, with an aquiline nose. Her gestures, the cold expression of her eyes and her manner of speech betray a strong will, a stern character and an acute mind. Like a tree in winter, she has lost the verdure of youth, but the trunk is sturdy and the branches strong. Her head has been silvered by the hoar frost of time. The guests, entering the reception-room, where the Princess sat on a green upholstered divan, approached her stern majesty with awe and reverence, as if she were a goddess.

In the evening the assembly supped in the large front hall. Wax candles burned brightly in three chandeliers. Supper was served at a long table decked with valuable plate, Saxony porcelain, cut glass, and bowls of roses. Salmon, sturgeon, tender veal, turkey fattened on walnuts—what was there not on that table! Hothouse fruit, pears, apples, heaps of sweetmeats of various kinds, and refreshing beverages without number. . . . Champagne flowed like water. I watched the scene in the dining-hall from the pantry. Now and again old Karelin came tripping in, perspiring, tired, but happy. Forcing a pinch of snuff into his nostril, he talked without stopping—many are loquacious at his age—and in the brief moments in which he rested he managed to communicate to me something that was extremely interesting. Oh, Massimo! Inspiration is deserting my pen. I feel that it is beyond my power to convey Karelin's narrative to you, but it must reach you exactly as I heard it. Try to picture to yourself this little old man with a round face, the colour of well-cooked ham, and a head as bald as a turnip. His blue eyes have faded with age, and they water. His embroidered coat and tight-fitting velvet breeches are spotlessly clean and neat, and his enormous collar and cravat are as white as Russian snow. His pleasant, deep voice penetrates one's heart. Try to picture this charming figure to yourself, but don't let *me*, but the *dvoretsky* himself, tell you the story. . . ."

CHAPTER FOUR

Karelin's Narrative

According to science, theoretical and practical, my dear Signor Battaglia, thirty years is a large span of a man's life. And so, in 1781 we were much younger than we are now. Princess Anna Alexandrovna was not yet twenty, and your master had barely reached sixteen. I looked quite a gallant then, Sir. . . . Ah! A-tishu! . . . Thanks! . . . At this tender age, Prince Peter Ivanovich lived with his father in the Caucasus, near the town of Kizlyar. They lived, as it were, on the roof of the world, where the laundresses, standing at their washtubs, rested their soap against the sky. And they were obliged to live in so remote a place because Prince Peter's father, though of great and ancient lineage, was as poor as a church mouse. He was a retired Colonel, and except for a small orchard near Kizlyar, he possessed nothing. His Highness took to drink, which drew him as a magnet attracts iron, and he sank into poverty. And so they lived in this orchard, the old Prince alternating spells of indolence with spells of industry to save himself from—God forbid!—going out of his mind.

The time came, however, for the young Prince to go into military service. But how was that to be arranged? God knows! It could not be done without assistance, and so they began to enumerate the benefactors they had in the capital. They remembered our Princess. Her benevolence was then common knowledge. . . . Ah! A—tishu! . . . Thanks! She willingly undertook to make all the arrangements, and in order that the lot of her nephew might be of the best, she called him to St. Petersburg. Prince Peter arrived—swarthy, scraggy, and of short stature. . . . An undersized jackdaw—nothing more. And what was worse, his clothes made him positively unpresentable. He wore something that was a cross between a long tunic and a Caucasian *beshmet*, over that a cloak of the most comical pattern, and all made of the coarsest camel-hair cloth. This was his entire outfit! I can see your master in that rig even now. . . . Dear, oh dear!

At that time Russia was reigned over by Catherine the Second, a sovereign with the greatest of minds and the warmest of hearts. Military affairs at that time were entirely in the hands of that celebrated miracle-worker, His Highness Prince Potemkin. Our Princess determined to hitch her nephew to this great star to enable him to take the first step on the road of fortune. And she caught on! Once started, things moved very quickly. While Peter Ivanovich was having a coat, a camisole and breeches made at the best tailor in the capital and was taking lessons in deportment and French, a courier from Potemkin arrived, suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, with a request that the minor of the nobility Bagrattion should present himself to His Highness with a view to securing an early appointment. . . . But how was he to be presented? He had nothing to wear, Sir. . . . The impatient courier was waiting at the porch, his spirited horses snorting impatiently and pawing the ground. The whole place was thrown into confusion. The whole house was in an uproar, but nothing could be done. God knows what would have come out of this fuss and bustle had it not been for me. This world, Signor Battaglia, is a labyrinth and a riddle. Everything in it has its uses. I, too, proved to be of use. At that time the *Anglaise* was still in fashion, and our master, Prince Boris Andreyevich, who went everywhere and was not the meanest of the beaus of his day—danced the *Anglaise* with superb grace in the ball-rooms of different palaces. For evening assemblies he had an incalculable number of silk coats of every colour, each more gorgeous than the other, some of them with diamond buttons. As soon as he grew tired of a coat, he would cast it off and that meant a new present for me. This explains why I was such a beau: hair powdered and combed in three coils, cravats, camisoles of the brightest colours, and coats without number—in short, a Prince Charming and not a servant. On the day the commotion occurred, Prince Boris Andreyevich, owing to the life of gaiety he led, was away from home, so his wardrobe could not be drawn on. Suddenly our Princess set eyes on me, dressed in a light blue coat and a jabot of the finest lace. She looked at me once and then a second time, put her finger to her lips and, pondering a little, burst out laughing. "Stop, Nikishka!" she said. "Off with your clothes!" Picture my embarrassment! I hesitated, but the Princess looked at me sternly and I hastened to obey. I was undressed in a trice, from wig to shoes, and stood there, petrified, only in my frayed underwear, wondering what would happen next. The Princess then turned to your master and said: "Prince Peter, dress!" Prince Peter did not wait to be asked a second time. In a flash he changed from his long Circassian cloak into a short coat and looked a perfect beau, and as much at ease as if he had worn nothing but silk French clothes all his life. It so happened that we were both of the same height and build. Prince Peter Ivanovich drove off post-haste to the palace. He was received by His Highness with no little pomp, and His Highness took a liking to the little Prince. True, being young, he was rather shy and reticent. But, Sir, wisdom is acquired not only from books, but also from observation. His Highness took a liking to the Prince. . . . An hour later he returned, no longer a minor, but a Sergeant of the Kiev Musketeers Regiment, Sir! He came back beaming with joy. It seemed to him that he was in heaven and could hear the angels sing. Soon the wine and the punch began to flow. And so, my dear Sir, I was present when your master took the first step of his career not as a mere eyewitness, but as one of the chief actors. . . . This world is a riddle, Sir, as you have no doubt read in the Scriptures.

Continuation of E. S. Battaglia's Letter

'. . . Now picture to yourself, Massimo, a vast terrace and on it, after supper, a numerous company thronging around my master. The stone steps, overgrown with moss as soft as velvet, lead straight through the garden into the long avenues of the century-old park. At the entrance to the park glitters the pond, and the statues and obelisks gleam in the pale moonlight. Somewhere, beyond the garden, peasants are dancing (here they call it *khorovod*) and the ringing strains of merry village tunes are wafted to our ears. The evening is warm and wonderfully tranquil. The flames of the candles burning in large bronze candelabras on the terrace are motionless in spite of the fact that the windows are open. I swear by the powers of Heaven that I have never seen so enchanting an evening even in Italy.

Nevertheless, a sense of dread oppressed the company and put a check on conversation. Nobody praised the beauty of the evening, nobody left the terrace for the garden, and the Prince—the host—ordered Karelin in a whisper immediately to stop the peasants' singing and dancing in the back courtyard. Everybody gazed spellbound into the clear dark-blue sky. In its fathomless depths, where the seven stars of the Great Bear usually shine, the monstrous broom of an invisible witch—a ruddy comet with a crimson, downturned tail—was sweeping across the sky. The weird magnificence of this spectacle sent a painfully sweet tremor through one's heart. This was not the first night that millions of eyes had been turned towards the sky, unable to accustom themselves to it in its new guise. One wanted to delve down to the hidden meaning of this extraordinary phenomenon, but no explanation for it could be found. And this was the cause of the dread everyone felt.

"The comet, the comet!" flew from mouth to mouth in the terrace. "What does it betoken? Oh God!"*

My master, too, seemed to be deeply affected. He folded his arms across his chest, over his diamond Orders and broad blue sash, and dropping his head, stood in deep reflection. Suddenly he said:

"It is not this phenomenon that disturbs me, but the fate that awaits the whole of Russia. . . . Friends! Our country is in peril! Napoleon may hurl himself upon us any day. War is inevitable—a war, the like of which the world has never seen. The freedom of our nation, the honour of our sacred Russian soil, everything will be at stake!"

He threw his head back proudly, causing the decorations on his breast to tinkle. He drew his sword half-way from its scabbard with an accustomed gesture and smartly thrust it back again. So tense was the silence that I felt my hair stand on end.

Amidst the throng, standing near my master, was an aged General in a purple camelot uniform of a quaint, old-fashioned pattern. In Russia there are many retired Generals. I have met them more than once. Most of them are country squires who hardly ever leave their lonely manors. This veteran stepped out of the throng and spoke, shyly and hesitantly, his voice trembling with emotion. Tears glistened in his small grey eyes.

"Your Highness!" he began. "Hearing your voice it seems to me that I hear the voice of Suvorov; that it is not you I see, but him. You, our new hero, have been made in the likeness and image of that great Russian. . . ."

Taking several paces forward he continued:

"Suvorov is the father of Russia's glory, you are its son! Where Bagrattion is, there is victory! We have none like you. No!"

And then, extending his arms pleadingly, he cried:

"Your Highness! . . . Save . . . save Russia, Prince!"

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* This comet remained in the sky until late in the autumn of 1811.

My master's face paled. When his swarthy face suddenly grows pale like this it assumes a sallow hue and he is terrible to look at. I knew that during those few moments he was gasping with pain—his breast could not bear the mighty strokes of his agitated heart. He turned to enter the house, but halted on the threshold of the drawing-room, which was brilliantly lit with Carcel lamps, and the walls, the furniture and the fluffy carpet of which were of amber colour. Here my master's face assumed even a more pallid hue. I wanted to run to him, but he raised his arm and everybody stood as if transfixed.

"My friends!" he said, his voice husky with emotion, "I swear by the happiness of our country, by the glorious names of our ancestors, by all that I hold sacred in this world. . . ."

He pressed his hand to his breast.

"I swear to die for Russia! . . ."

. . . I have not to this day learned the origin of the quaint custom the Russians have of tossing their military heroes. Perhaps it can be traced to hoary antiquity when the Roman legionaries honoured their conquering heroes by carrying them standing on a shield. Be that as it may, it seems to me to have been purposely introduced for the Russians. I see something radiant, like true glory, in the spontaneous fervour with which they honour their heroes in this way. . . .

Scores of hands gripped my master and with joyous enthusiasm threw him up "in a hurrah!" as they call it here. The Prince, in his heart, was always fond of a soldier's rough-and-tumble, and needless to say, he was delighted. His face was flushed, which showed that his heart was beating more freely and easily. He was not in the habit of remaining sad for long and as he soared to the ceiling his laughter was merry and carefree. This went on for quite a long while.

Finding himself on his feet at last the Prince stepped to the door and pushing the curtain aside found Karelin hiding behind it. The old man had been watching the scene and it had been one of the happiest moments of his life. His puny body was shaking with irrepressible sobs of joy. My master put his arm round the *dvoretsky's* shoulder and drew him to the middle of the room.

"Dear Nikita! You dear old soul!" he said, warmly embracing Karelin. Then he kissed him on the cheek and said loudly, so loudly that everybody heard:

"Without you I would not be what I am. Thank you for the past, my heart! Thank you a thousand times! . . ."

. . . Late at night I helped my master to undress on his retiring to bed. He was silent and pensive. Of his recent merriment not a trace was left, and his grave demeanour seemed to harmonize with the measured ticking of the English clock standing on the mirror shelf between the windows of the Prince's bedroom. The minute hand travelled its course and the clock struck one, followed by the numerous other clocks standing or hanging in the different rooms of this vast house. These jarring sounds woke the Prince out of his reverie. He rose from his armchair, sat on the bed and said gravely:

"If my country is to perish, Silvio . . . let me be the first to die!"

Words like these cannot be heard with indifference no matter by whom they are uttered; but here they were uttered by a great warrior of a great country, prompted by the heart of a great soldier who was not too proud to bestow upon an old servant a kiss of gratitude. God knows what happened to me . . . nor do I remember how it happened, but I, a free Italian, grasped the graceful hand of this wonderful man and kissed it again and again. I think I whispered something at that moment, something very banal such as:

"The heavens will fall and the Po flow upstream before I. . . ."

But the important thing is not what I whispered, or whether I whispered anything at all, but the fact that I kissed his hand and felt not worse, but better than I had felt before. . . .

. . . These then, dear Massimo, are the circumstances, which, I think, explain better than any lengthy discourse why I do not regard my humble occupation as degrading, and why I do not strive for any higher station in life. If you fail to understand this, it is not my fault. I have never written so lengthy a disquisition in my life, but the subject is worth it. Do not be offended by my candour, Massimo. Nobody knows where truth lies hidden. And what does it matter to those who have convictions? And so I am addressing not so much His Majesty's Lieutenant, as the little smith's apprentice, whom I left at the Porta Vercelli outside of Milan, twelve years ago. I address myself to him and beg of him not to spurn my friendly and fraternal embrace. I also tenderly embrace Aunt Bobbina. I would very much like to know whether she still prays to St. Boniface for me every morning and evening, after breakfast and after dinner. Please excuse my scribble and remember kindly your

Enea Silvio Battaglia

Village of Simi, Vladimir Gubernia, June 18, 1811

* * *

Muratov and Olferyev stood looking at each other in silence for several moments and then embraced, also without words, their faces radiant with joy. Muratov carefully placed Bagrattion's gift in his inside pocket.

"I will guard it here as long as my heart beats, Alyosha!" he said.

CHAPTER FIVE

The City Governor was a retired Cavalry Major and in peace time was fond of the bottle and the snuff-box. At the present moment he was standing before Bagrattion, as pale as a sheet, his lower jaw trembling.

"Your Highness, Your Highness," he kept repeating in a pleading voice. "For Christ's sake, where am I to get it all? Provide quarters, build stoves to dry bread for rusks, firewood, carts, everything in the world! . . . Your Highness! You have been round this little town. . . . Where am I to get it all? What can I do? Throw myself into the river?"

Bagrattion raised his hand and brought it down in front of the City Governor's ruby nose with such force that the latter actually felt the air swish past.

"I don't want to hear anything about it! See that the things are there, otherwise I shall hang you!"

Olferyev watched this scene with mixed feelings. Both were right in their way. Prince Peter Ivanovich was usually kind and considerate with subordinates, but tireless himself, he was extremely stern and exacting in cases of emergency. As for the City Governor . . . the old Major flushed, his jaw ceased to tremble.

"What! Hang me?" he roared. "What for, Sir? Have I not shed my blood for my Emperor? Is not my son, Ziminsky, a Sub-Lieutenant in the Smolensk Regiment, in your 7th Corps, hoping to lay down his life for his country under your command? Hang me! What do you mean, Sir?"

The City Governor pulled off his green tunic and tearing open his shirt, shouted, almost weeping with vexation:

"Look at these wounds, Sir!"

Bagrattion wanted to turn away, but the Major stopped him.

"No, no! Look, Your Highness!"

Many years ago the old man's shoulder had been shattered by a bomb splinter and had remained twisted and mutilated. Across his chest ran a livid scar, the effect of a deep sabre wound. Lower down. . . . Prince Peter Ivanovich strode up to the old veteran and embraced him.

"I apologize, my heart!" he said. "I thought you were one of those nettle-seed products.* I did not know you were one of us. Please, forgive me. And, now without any fuss and noise I say: if you don't get these things I shall have you shot!"

The City Governor remained standing with shoulder and chest bared and stared at the Prince in silent amazement for several seconds. Then he adjusted his shirt, put on his tunic, carefully fastened the buttons and springing smartly to attention he blurted out:

"It will be done!"

* * *

"Now, sit down, Alyosha, and write what I shall dictate to you. Or . . . wait a moment. I am not a clerk to be able to compose letters to the Tsar every day. I am a soldier. My function is to command. But they won't let me do it. Suppose, the Minister** resigned? In that case I would be in Vitebsk tomorrow, and there I would hunt out Witgenstein and his 1st Corps and advance by forced marches, giving the order: Attack! That is my style. The early bird catches the worm. Oh! The importance of speed! If I didn't smash Monsieur Napoleon to smithereens I'd deserve to be shot! But what can I do? His Majesty has not revealed to me the general plan of operations. The Minister knows, but is keeping it a secret from me."

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* A contemptuous term applied by military men to officials in the Civil Service.

** General Barclay de Tolly simultaneously held the posts of Minister for War and Commander-in-Chief of the First Army. His orders were binding on Bagrattion.

Bagrattion paced up and down the room, but suddenly an idea struck him. He stopped in front of Olferyev. His flashing eyes seemed to be riveted on the young officer, but the latter felt that the Prince did not see him.

"But supposing the Minister, too, knows nothing except that His Majesty is averse to the Army heavily engaging the enemy?" he mused. "His Majesty is secretive and it is quite possible that Barclay knows no more than I. In any case I think the Minister either lacks intelligence or else is a fox. If he knows and says nothing, it is disgusting. But if he does not know and says nothing it is equally disgusting, because he is ashamed to confess that his position is no better than mine. He is a mere clerk, His Majesty's bailiff and not a Minister. Nevertheless, he bears the title of Minister and is sitting on my neck. . . ."

In saying this Bagrattion struck himself on the back of the neck. Rancorous thoughts swept through his mind like storm clouds across the sky, dark and heavy, ready to burst in a flood of angry words. Was Barclay the only one sitting on his neck? What about that curly-haired beauty with the thin, slightly compressed lips, the Chief of Staff of the Second Army, Monsieur, Adjutant-General Count de Saint-Priest? His father was a Frenchman and his mother an Austrian. He was born in Constantinople and was educated at the Heidelberg University. He has been in Russian service since he was seventeen. At Austerlitz he lost his horse and for that was awarded the St. George's Cross. At Guttstadt he received a shrapnel wound in the leg. Excellent! But who is this Count? What is he to Russia? Why is he the Chief of Staff of one of the Russian armies and the Emperor's Adjutant-General? The Tsar writes to him. What about? I cannot get anything out of him. Sometimes he comes forward with some new and unexpected plan, obviously not his own, but the Tsar's. But why should the Tsar reveal his plans to Saint-Priest and keep them a secret from his Commander-in-Chief? It turns out that the Commander-in-Chief must obey his Chief of Staff, a mere whippersnapper, and a rascal at that. And what a sharp ear this Frenchy has! Perhaps he is a spy? "We have been betrayed," thought Bagrattion to himself bitterly. "We are being led to disaster. How can one remain calm? Grief and vexation are choking. . . ." He sat down at the table opposite Olferyev and said:

"I wanted to write to the Tsar, but I've changed my mind. To relieve my feelings, however, let us, Alyosha, my heart, write a few lines to your namesake, Alexei Petrovich Yermolov. Start right off without any preliminaries: 'Dear namesake,* I am choking with grief and vexation. I am ashamed of my uniform! The Minister is in flight, leaving me to defend the whole of Russia. What a dirty trick! By God, I'll throw off my uniform!'"

Bagrattion glanced at his aide-de-camp and saw tears glistening in his grey eyes. His face, as tender as a girl's, was contorted by suffering and despair. Prince Peter felt sorry for him. He stretched his arm across the table, took the young officer by the ear, and drawing him gently towards himself, he whispered:

"Don't grieve, my heart. We'll pull Russia out of the hole first, and only after that will I throw off my uniform. I have no one dependent upon me, so what will it matter? But I'm not so sure that I will throw off my uniform. We are writing to Yermolov, aren't we? He is sly, is Pater Gruber.[*] He will show the letter to the Minister. That's exactly what I want!"

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* Meaning General Yermolov.

* * *

The floor and bunks in the general room at Headquarters of the Second Army were littered with bundles, trunks and saddles. The tables, stools and chairs were scattered about in disorder as if a fracas had taken place in the room. Orderlies were crowding round the door waiting for instructions. There were about fifteen officers in the room in tunics, spencers, or simply in dressing gowns, some pacing up and down smoking pipes, others squatting on trunks and writing. The room buzzed with conversation and laughter. Regimental clerks came in and out, and now and again despatch riders arrived with reports from the outposts.

His Majesty's aide-de-camp arrived at Headquarters of the Second Army about midday. At the sight of his gold epaulets and insignia the officers in the general room ceased their conversation and stood in respectful silence. The aide-de-camp had a typically German, pasteboard face, which looked all creased and tired, with soft hollow cheeks, and that vacant smile common among courtiers—insincere, evasive and indifferent. In his gait and manners he obviously copied the Tsar; he stooped and stretched his neck forward as if expecting to hear or wanting to communicate something very important. For a whole day and night he had ridden post-haste through this wooded and swampy district, his coach rattling over the rough cobblestones with which the roads of Byelorussia were paved. The journey had been a perfect torture and his chest still ached from the long shaking and jolting. He looked round the room and opened his mouth to ask for the Commander-in-Chief when the door of an inner room opened and Count Saint-Priest appeared. Striding rapidly towards the new arrival with outstretched arms he exclaimed joyfully:

"My God! How did you get here, Colonel? What have you brought us?"

"*Es ist schauerlich!*"[**] answered the new arrival. "The roads have become so difficult and dangerous that in sending me, His Majesty gave me no written orders."

"Which way did you come?"

"Through Drissa, Borisov and Minsk. On the way I passed numerous equipages and a continuous stream of baggage carts riding in the opposite direction. Near Minsk I encountered the Governor and his officials fleeing from the city. They assured me that the enemy would be in Minsk within half an hour, but I managed to drive through the streets safely. Actually the French were there an hour later."

The officers gasped at these last words. What? The French have taken Minsk? The Second Army was hastening to Minsk to bar Davout's road

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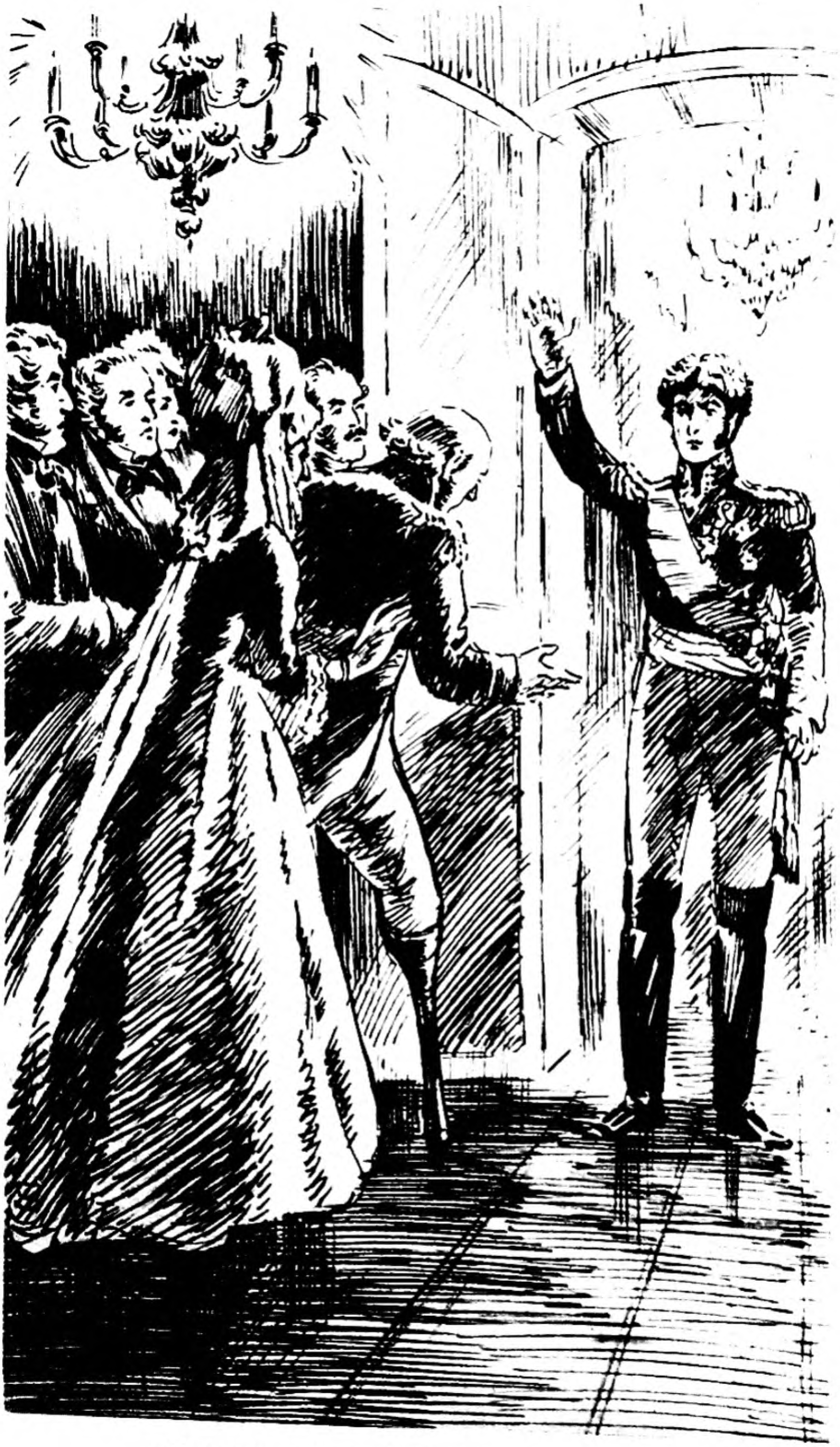
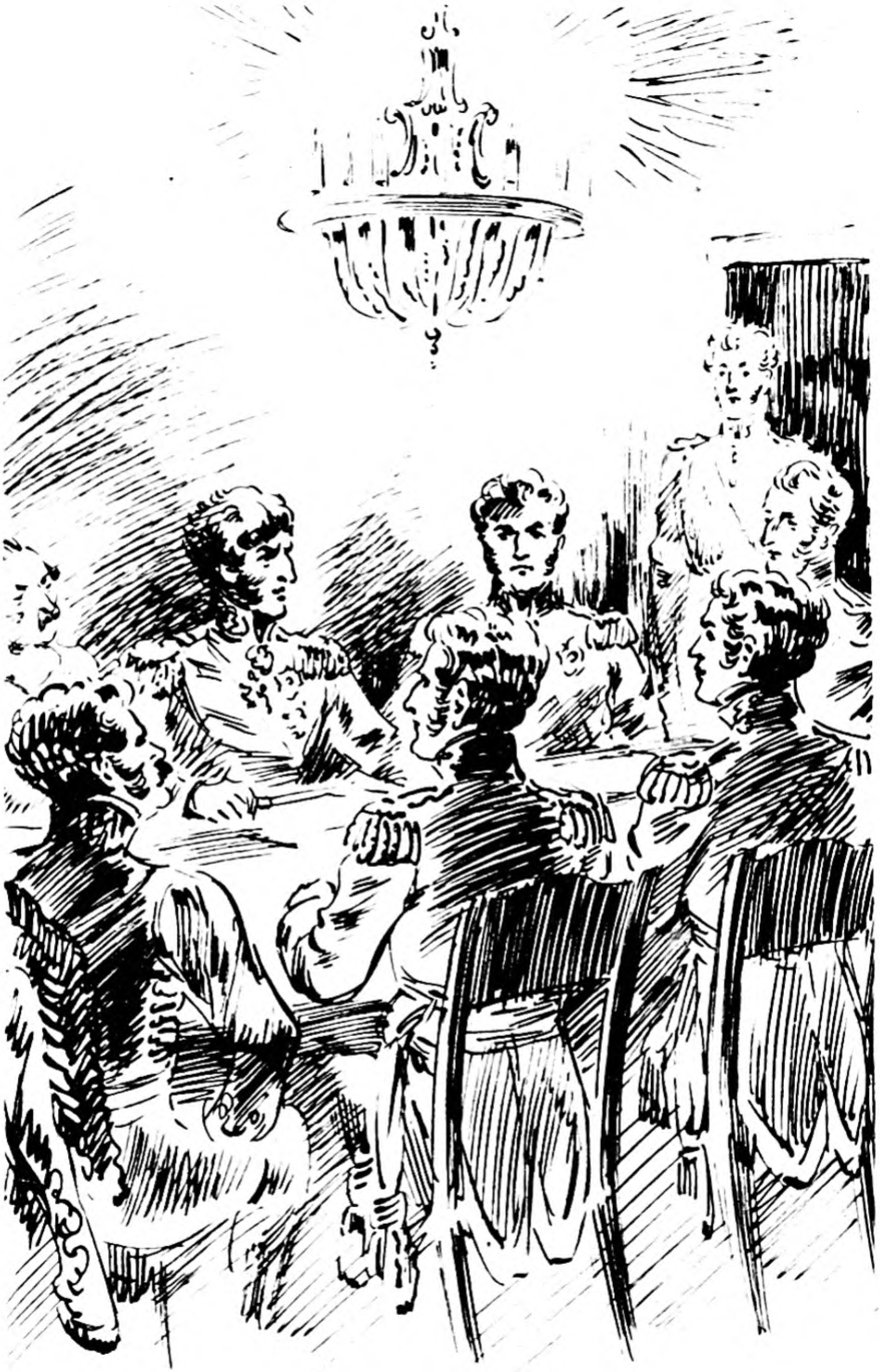
[*] Pater Gruber, a well-known Jesuit. The nickname General A. P. Yermolov bore among his intimates.

[**] It is awful!



"He halted on the threshold of the drawing-room"



"Bagrattion listened with a displeased, almost angry demeanour" to central Russia . . . and now Minsk was taken! That means that Davout had forestalled the Second Army. . . . Consequently, the Commander-in-Chief's plans have collapsed. . . . Saint-Priest took the aide-de-camp by the arm and led him to an inner room. Here they were alone. Saint-Priest carefully closed the door and placed a heavy bench against it.

"I know how cautious you are as a rule, dear Colonel, and I was therefore astonished at the candour with which you just now informed *urbi et orbi* about the disaster that has befallen us," he said.

The aide-de-camp started. Indeed, his customary restraint had deserted him. It was that accursed jolting on the roads. The mistake must be rectified. But how can that be done without damage to his dignity and his reputation as the Tsar's intimate? A frown clouded his insipid face.

"Why conceal the truth?" he said. "Let the Second Army know what the naive self-confidence and groundless boastfulness of its commander leads to. . . . Actually, what happened? Napoleon caused rumours to be spread to the effect that his main forces were concentrated in Warsaw and that the Austrian Army would move against us from Galicia. Consequently, we divided our forces. Meanwhile Napoleon commenced hostilities in a way totally different from what we expected. He crossed the Niemen with his main forces near Kovno and sent Davout to Minsk against Prince Bagrattion. It is quite apparent now that his object is to prevent the junction between Generals Bagrattion and Barclay. From this aspect the loss of Minsk is disastrous. I will not conceal from you, dear Count, that your Commander-in-Chief's operations are causing His Majesty grave apprehension. You are instructed to watch Prince Bagrattion and to study him. Tell me. . . ."

Saint-Priest passed his hand across his pale, lean face and seemed to leave a shadow on it. His beautiful eyes darkened and became sad.

"Our Commander-in-Chief," he began, "is inimitable in his bursts of inspiration. He is brave in battle, cool in danger, extraordinarily efficient and firm in conducting operations. But. . . ."

"But?"

"You see. . . . Prince Bagrattion lived a wild life in his youth. He had no time to acquire an education. He learned the art of war from practical experience, and as practical experience often runs counter to the book learning of armchair science, the Prince differs peculiarly from many of the other military leaders. This partly explains the magic influence he exercises on the minds of highly educated Generals such as Rayevsky, for example. They follow him blindly. *Je le leur disais bien. Mais ils n'ont pas voulu suivre mes conseils, eh bien les voilà punis!*"*

"You are right. The Prince has allowed Minsk to slip out of his hands. His Majesty fears that similar blunders will be repeated and is of the opinion that the Prince's lack of military education and general learning disarms him in face of Bonaparte's magnificent strategy. . . ."

"Bonaparte—yes, but, fortunately for us, Napoleon has not with him either Masséna, or Marmont, or Lannes, or Jourdan, or Soult, or Augereau. One of these brilliant commanders is the chief of the Hotel des Invalides

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* I warned them, but they refused to accept my advice, and now they are paying for it.

Acc. No: 2034

in Paris. Another bears on his forehead the Judas brand of treachery, while others are acting as tutors to the blockheaded brothers of the genius. Murat, Ney and Davout are in Russia. They are first-class talents, but which of them is more learned than Bagrattion? I would ask you, dear Colonel, to deliver a letter to His Majesty from me. In it I have expressed these opinions, as well as many others, of the nature of which His Majesty will no doubt apprise you. I am happy at the confidence His Majesty places in me, but I am depressed by the burden of the ambiguous role I have to play here in relation to Prince Bagrattion. I hate Napoleon so much that I, with involuntary ardour, share the Prince's most reckless impulses, but for all that I cannot win his favour. He regards me, primarily, as an observing eye, and this irritates him. To him I am a man without a country, and he refuses to understand that for the past twenty years loyalty to oath and honour has served me as a substitute for loyalty to country. . . ."

Saint-Priest's voice broke with emotion.

"I strive to feel a Russian, and I will say without boasting that I succeed. But what of that? The Prince is continuously pushing me back into some ambiguous and extremely embarrassing position. I fear that I shall never conquer his prejudice. . . ."

"Perhaps Your Highness intends to request His Majesty to transfer you to the First Army?"

"No. General Barclay would please me still less as a chief. Incidentally, he knows no more about His Majesty's plans than my Commander-in-Chief, does he?"

"He knows more. But, of course, not all. It is His Majesty's idea that the First Army should retire to the fortified camp of Drissa, and General Barclay is merely carrying it out."

Suddenly the loud voice of Bagrattion was heard.

"Blazes! Where has the Count got to? With His Majesty's aide-de-camp? You're not dreaming, are you, my heart?"

Saint-Priest and the Colonel jumped up simultaneously. The Count nervously compressed his lips and ran to remove the bench from the door. The Colonel straightened his tunic and adjusted his aiguillettes.

CHAPTER SIX

Lieutenant-General Rayevsky, the commander of the 7th Corps, was slightly deaf and consequently detested so-called Councils of War. Moreover, he had attended so many of them and had seen their decisions flouted so often, that he considered them a waste of time. He particularly disliked Councils of War held in the presence of emissaries from the Tsar, such as the present one. Military operations would recede into the background and the entire proceedings would be reduced to the tiresome game of human ambition. Rayevsky knew beforehand how the different interests would be grouped, what camps would be formed, and the motives that would prompt each member of the Council to speak in the way he did. The Commander-in-

Chief would be supported by the Ataman of the Don Cossacks Platov because of his blind devotion, and by himself, Rayevsky, because he was convinced of the superiority of daring and independent military ideas over timid and craven ones. The Tsar's emissary would look on and say nothing, but the object of his mission would be explained by Saint-Priest, who would be ostensibly expressing his own opinions. Bagrattion would be supported out of friendship and common chivalry by Count Vorontsov, the commander of the mixed Grenadier Division. Vassilchikov, the commander of the Akhtyrka Hussars, would swing helplessly from one side to the other. Bagrattion's position would be worse than anyone's owing to his hot temper, and his, Rayevsky's, would be most uncomfortable of all because of his deafness and annoyance.

Nikolai Nikolayevich Rayevsky sat next to Bagrattion, his elbow resting on the back of the Prince's chair, his curly head propped on his fist. His face, his short but graceful figure, his gestures and his very posture testified to the nobility of his mind and character. He turned towards Bagrattion, glanced at Vorontsov, dropped his head and became engrossed in his thoughts, and he did this with simple and natural dignity, without the slightest attempt to pose. At the same time his features expressed weariness, coldness and, perhaps, even indifference. Such people often rouse great expectations, but do not always come up to them.

"Permit me to submit to Your Highness a plan which is at once resolute and cautious," Saint-Priest was saying in an ingratiating tone. "It follows logically from our present position. Although cut off from the First Army we can, however, without great difficulty, concentrate all our forces in Nieswiez. Taking advantage of the natural features of the locality, and also of the ancient castle of the Princess Radziwill, we can easily fortify ourselves there and await the enemy not in an open position, but in a fortified camp similar to the Drissa camp, to which the First Army is marching. . . ." Bagrattion listened with a displeased, almost angry demeanour.

"No good," he said firmly and bluntly. Then recollecting that Saint-Priest's proposal was probably one of the Emperor's plans brought by his aide-de-camp and that, as usual, the Commander-in-Chief had been deprived of his natural role by means of a rather mean trick, he continued in a more emphatic tone:

"No, it's no good! Nieswiez may serve as a point on our Army's route, but to sit there and wait until the enemy appears with nothing to prevent him from passing is a bad plan. This is just another of the blunders that have been committed one after another, since the opening of hostilities. And even before that a mistake was made in lining us up on the frontier like chequers on a chequer-board and making us stand there gaping with our mouths wide open. I know what the object was. By means of thin cordons to occupy all three of Napoleon's possible lines of advance: from Tilsit to St. Petersburg, from Kovno to Moscow and from Grodno to Moscow. But it never occurred to those who planned this that to place thin cordons across an operational direction does not mean cutting it. No, it means something else; it means dividing your forces and allowing the enemy to defeat them piecemeal. The initiators of this plan imagined that Napoleon would, without fail, attack the First Army. Our Army was to have operated on his flanks, and General Tormassov, with the Third Army, on the flank of those troops which, it was anticipated, would attack the Second. Oh, how clever! Oh, how shrewd! But that canaille Bonaparte set out against the First and Second Armies simultaneously! Then—because he was scared, or for some other reason—some plaguy courtier and pedant, one of those whom Suvorov called 'dirty schemers,' ordered us to flee. . . ."

Uttering these bold words Bagrattion proudly raised his head and looked into the embarrassed faces of the Generals seated round the table.

"The pedant ordered—and we fled. Where to? Nobody knew. Oh, what a disgrace! It is enough to make one weep. On June 16 I began the retreat to Minsk and counted on being there by the 25th. Good! Very good! But on the 18th, in Zelva, you, Colonel, brought me his Majesty's orders to proceed *via* Nowogródek and Wilejka to Swienciany. Only then did I, the Commander-in-Chief, learn that it was deemed advisable for the First and Second Armies to concentrate against Bonaparte's main forces. Where?

"It transpired that Swienciany had been chosen as the pivot of the general operations. Excellent! I reached the Niemen and was just about to cross, but an accident saved me—the bridge collapsed. I was delayed, thank God! On the 23rd I learned that the Tsar and his Minister were in Swienciany, and that the pivot was left suspended between heaven and earth. At that hour Davout cut the road to Vitebsk and I had only the forests and impassable swamps before me. What was to be done? Again I decided to march to Minsk. But the lost days, who will retrieve them? Nobody. I learned that formidable French forces were hastening to Minsk, but I could no longer forestall them, my short road was cut, I was hopelessly late. I thought of giving battle, defeating the French at Minsk and forcing my way to the First Army, but that would have meant sacrificing large numbers of men and considerable baggage. So I decided to march to Mir and Kaidanov in order to escape from Davout and at the same time fulfil the august command to join the First Army. I ordered Matvei Ivanovich* to return to the left bank of the Niemen at Nikolayev in order to screen my movements by a feint. I calculated that on hearing that I had recrossed the Niemen at Nikolayev, the French would break their march to Minsk and try to cut me off from the First Army, while I, in the meantime, would reach Minsk and break through. . . . Ugh!"

Bagrattion mopped his pale and perspiring face with a handkerchief.

"Now comes the *finale*. Monsieur, His Majesty's aide-de-camp arrives today and informs me that the French have occupied Minsk. We have still two big marches ahead of us and can barely reach it by the 27th. The Colonel will return to the Emperor's Headquarters and report to His Majesty that Bagrattion is a fool and an ignoramus and has allowed Minsk to slip out of his hands. And I presume that Monsieur the Chief of Staff will write to His Majesty in the same strain in a private letter. The fool Bagrattion is surrounded like a hunted bear. The French are in Wilejka and Wolozyn, and King Jerome is threatening our rear from Nowogródek. Davout has 60,000 men, Jerome has as many, but Bagrattion has only 40,000. The fool Bagrattion is as doomed as the Swedes were at Poltava! And under these circumstances Monsieur the Chief of Staff of the Army, Adjutant-General Count de Saint-Priest, proposes that I should march to Nieswiez and there calmly await the enemy. Is that practical? Good God, no!"

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* General Platov, Ataman of the Don Cossacks.

He stopped speaking and breathed heavily. After a slight pause he continued:

"Not a day passes but what a blunder is committed; not an hour passes without a slip, and Bagrattion is to blame! Who else is to blame but he? Who ordered him to go first one way and then another, and lose Minsk as a consequence? Who orders things in such a queer fashion that Bagrattion presses forward with all his might towards the First Army, only to find that it eludes him again and again? And does it not look as if he will continue to press forward and that it will continue to elude him? I wrote to His Majesty as soon as Napoleon had crossed the Niemen and proposed that the Second Army and the Cossacks should strike hard at Napoleon's rear while the First Army launched a frontal attack. It was His Majesty's pleasure to withhold his consent to this plan. I was ordered to join the Minister's forces in Drissa. Since then I have been obeying the Minister like a corporal. I wrote again to His Majesty . . . humbly and grief stricken, regretting that I lacked His Majesty's confidence and was ignorant of the plan of operations. It had not been revealed to me. Perhaps, it was being kept from me, and as a consequence, it was difficult for me to dispose of the Army in the most expedient way. His Majesty was gracious enough to reply to me in his own hand. Flattering! God, how flattering! Nevertheless, I am still in ignorance of our plan of operations, and I am compelled to ask myself whether any such plan exists. I love the Tsar as I love my own soul, but it is evident that he does not love me. He dislikes me! And the troops are grumbling, everybody is discontented. I cannot remain indifferent. I am almost crushed by grief, I swear to you, gentlemen!"

General Rayevsky raised his head; his cold grave face expressed disgust:

"His Highness is quite right," he interjected in a tired voice. "Much has been irretrievably lost; operations are not coordinated; the Second Army is in a difficult, almost hopeless position. . . . His Imperial Majesty has not thought fit to give us any commands, nor are any orders forthcoming from General Barclay de Tolly. The opinion of Count Emmanuel Franzevich," he continued, glancing at Saint-Priest, "cannot, I think, be approved of, because of the difficulties and positive dangers which must accompany the execution of his plan of operations. Under these circumstances, I am of the opinion that in order to save our Army we must abandon all previous plans and march to Mozyr, and there join not the First Army, but General Tormassov's Third Army."

A young General sitting beside Saint-Priest, tall, slim, with a face which, though handsome, had something viperish about it, smiled a polite but deprecating smile. This was Count Vorontsov. He was born in England, where his father had long served as Russian ambassador, and therefore spoke Russian with a pronounced English accent. Turning to

Rayevsky, and smiling more politely and deprecatingly with every phrase he uttered, he said:

"Your Excellency is going very far; so far as only one who knows not where he is going can go. His Highness the Commander-in-Chief has received no orders from His Majesty today. But what of that? We know the gist of His Majesty's plans. His Majesty desires that the Second Army should, without fail, join the First Army. That is the first point. In order to husband our forces he does not wish us to undertake unpremeditated, hazardous and dangerous operations at the very outset of the war. That is the second point. Lastly, in our resistance to the French advance he puts his trust in fortified camps, a sample of which has been prepared for the First Army at Drissa. I trust Your Excellency will agree that your proposal complies with none of His Majesty's three wishes. The opinion expressed by Count de Saint-Priest that we should retreat to Nieswiez in order to fortify ourselves in camp there, certainly complies with at least two of His Majesty's wishes. . . ."

At this juncture a General in a long, single-breasted coat without buttons, with a coarse face, high cheek bones and the manners of a savage, loudly hiccuped. This often happened to him at Councils of War when the desire to have a cut at the stronger side overcame him. But what could be expected from this boor of a Cossack who was born and bred in the steppes and believed in spells and charms as a means of averting evil? This old Don Cossack knew of a perfect remedy for hostility and strife.

"Excuse me, Gentlemen," he began, and hiccuping again made the sign of the cross over his mouth. "Not being over-blessed with brains, I shall probably put my foot in it. But sitting here and listening to what is going on I thought to myself that during the forty years I've been in the service I've never seen anything so topsy-turvy as things are here. Christ is my witness that this is so! Putting all jokes aside I want to tell you straight: the only man I expect common sense from, and who can tell me definitely where I am to shed my blood for my country, is Prince Peter Ivanovich."

Vorontsov and Saint-Priest whispered animatedly to each other. A snub-nosed, blue-eyed Major-General in a Hussar's spencer admiringly shook Platov's hand.

"Well, Larion Vassilyevich," muttered the Ataman, scratching the dimple on his broad chin, "what can you expect from us who were born and bred in the steppes?"

Rayevsky turned to the Hussar General and enquired in a voice that expressed boredom and annoyance:

"Why don't you help us by expressing your opinion, Mr. Vassilchikov?"

The commander of the Akhtyrka Hussars had felt embarrassed all through the proceedings. He had no opinion of his own, and Saint-Priest, Bagrattion, Rayevsky, Vorontsov and Platov, all jointly and severally, had spoken such practical common sense that he agreed with them all. What could he say? A flush mounted his fresh cheeks. He made an effort and answered with the aristocratic pride which is capable of covering up any degree of embarrassment:

"I am of junior rank. I was not invited to express an opinion, and I would find it easier to die first than to speak even last."

Rayevsky, a man without prejudice or sentiment, thought to himself:

"If this lad is not killed for his courage, then with the courtier's agility of his vacuous mind he will one day become the highest official in Russia. . . . "*

The supercilious smile that had been hovering on the lips of the Tsar's aide-de-camp suddenly vanished. He rose and everybody rose with him, expecting to hear something coming, as it were, from the lips of the Emperor himself.

"On sending me here His Majesty was pleased to say: 'Tell Prince Peter Ivanovich that Bonaparte, in keeping with his usual methods, will, of course, march towards Moscow with the object of intimidating Russia. But nothing on earth will compel me to lay down my arms as long as the enemy is on our soil. I would rather grow a beard and depart for Siberia than conclude peace.'"

The aide-de-camp bowed his head like a parson delivering a particularly solemn passage of a sermon. Continuing he said:

"Such are His Majesty's actual words, from which one may judge how great is the trust His Majesty places in the courage and wise foresight of Messieurs the Commander-in-Chief and Generals of the Second Army."

Having said this he approached Bagrattion to take his leave. He was in a hurry to depart. His carriage and escort were already waiting.

"What shall I report to His Majesty as being Your Highness's intentions?" he enquired.

The Commander-in-Chief rose and stood to attention, as if reporting to the Tsar in person:

"Report to him, Colonel, the proposal of Monsieur the Chief of my Staff and add that I totally disagree with it."

The Tsar's emissary took his departure and the Generals left this strange Council which seemed to have been called only for the purpose of causing many of the men at Imperial Headquarters to feel very uneasy a day or two later. Platov and Rayevsky, however, continued to sit with Bagrattion. Prince Peter was saying with great heat:

"It is time, my friends, that we Russians showed more spirit! We must understand that this is no ordinary war, but a national war! Our pedants will cause our ruin. I was nearly lost myself, but have managed to keep afloat, and will continue to do so. I don't want to show them my cards. Let them think that our position is bad. Actually it is splendid!"

"Your Highness is exaggerating," said Rayevsky to cool the Commander-in-Chief's ardour. "Our position is not desperate, but it is not good."

"No, Nikolai Nikolayevich, my heart, it is good, very good! I will prove it to you at once. Look at the map. One Army is on the other side of a big river. The other—our Army—is marching by the shortest route to join the first. Finding that the road is blocked it makes a detour: but here again—halt! A pitfall! That's right! I ask you, gentlemen, what must Bonaparte do now?"

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* Subsequently, in the reign of Nicholas I, L. V. Vassilchikov became President of the State Council, actually the highest post in the Empire.

Platov remained silent.

"Annihilate our Army, which can expect no assistance from the First Army," said Rayevsky as if forcing himself to speak.

"Golden words," replied Bagrattion. "That's right! But what is Bonaparte doing? Chasing the Minister! Why did Davout rush to Minsk? To cut me off from the Minister. King Jerome helped him. Wonderful! Well, what came of it? Nothing. We are safe and sound, thank God. The main object of Bonaparte's manoeuvre is still to attack the Minister. That's what makes our position so good. Bonaparte wants to cross the Dvina and threaten St. Petersburg and Moscow at one stroke. Where can Davout move now?"

"Your Highness knows best," said Platov.

"I think he can move either against our flank or against Moghilev," answered Rayevsky thoughtfully. "Most likely the latter. Keeping us in sight, he will threaten Smolensk and prevent us from crossing the Dnieper."

"Oh, my heart, you are right!" joyfully exclaimed Bagrattion. "Davout will hurl himself upon Moghilev. The entire French Army will move to the northeast, it has already started. One hundred thousand against St. Petersburg, and an equal number against Moscow. The Minister will either have to retire from the Drissa camp towards St. Petersburg, or else come into collision with Bonaparte. We, however. . . ."

He paused. His eyes and cheeks were burning.

". . . we, however, will go to Moghilev! To meet Davout! You did not think of that, did you?"

Rayevsky gasped in amazement. For the hundredth time he said to himself: "How keen and supple is his mind! Who would have thought it when we were both subalterns under Potemkin?" He cupped his deaf ear and listened intently as Bagrattion went on speaking:

"Our Army is less than a handful. What could I have started with? If it had turned out all right they would have said the Minister had accomplished it. If it had turned out wrong, they would have asked: who the devil ordered Bagrattion to interfere? And Bagrattion would have got it hot and strong. But not at Moghilev. There I am ready, and I am sure of the troops. The soldiers trust me, knowing that I regard them as my comrades. The soldiers and I—who can resist us?"

"How will you lead our Army to Moghilev?" enquired Rayevsky. "The French occupy all the roads."

"Ah, my heart! Look at the map again: Nieswiez, Slutsk, Bobruisk. . . . A circuitous route, you say? But then we'll march without having to fight. We'll fly! That's my plan. I shall lead the Army out of this mess and then throw off my uniform. I am afraid I shall go insane if the Minister does not stop retreating."

* * *

At last the Commander-in-Chief and the Cossack Ataman were left alone.

"I tell you frankly, Matvei Ivanovich, I don't want to have that man Saint-Priest with me," said Bagrattion in a passion. "It was His Majesty's pleasure to appoint him as my chaperon. But I don't want him! He's always whispering to somebody or other—now to the Tsar's aide-de-camp and now to Count Mikhail Vorontsov. Whispering is the business of scandal-mongers and . . . spies. In addition to all that, he is continually writing to the Tsar. What about? Who can tell? I write rarely, but he—he writes every day, and all in French. . . . For a long time I paid no attention to it, but lately it has got me on the raw. What shall I do, my heart?"

The Ataman twirled his stubby moustache and a smile flashed across his wrinkled face, so sly that one could not help thinking: cunning fox!

"Suppose, Your Highness, you sent him out to reconnoitre the enemy Army . . . . I will provide the escort. They will show him Napoleon's Army at such close quarters that he will give one look and then never see it again. We will make the French a present of this Count, and that will be the end of it. What do you think, Your Highness?"

Bagrattion shuddered and turned pale.

"Ugh! You have a Cossack's soul, old man! No, I am not capable of doing anything like that. Besides, why should we bestow immortality on him by means of a glorious death? Better let him continue to pester me. . . . Only we must be vigilant and keep on the watch. If he gives you any orders—don't budge without my permission!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

On June 28 Platov's Don Cossacks and Vassilchikov's light cavalry fought for eight hours near Mir with Marshal Davout's cavalry vanguard commanded by the Polish Generals Buzycki, Turne and Radziminski. Six enemy Uhlan regiments were partly cut up and speared and partly sent flying from the wide sandy field on which the battle had taken place. Platov's Cossacks pursued them for twenty versts* and brought back to camp a dozen captive officers and about three hundred men. This human booty was counted and sorted at the foot of a high mound on which the Don Ataman had pitched his tent in the midst of a boundless plain where the sixteen Cossack regiments had encamped.

The glorious day drew to a close. The evening was clear and warm. The sun was setting and the still air seemed to be permeated with rosy dust. Fires were burning outside the shacks the men had put up.

A long train of cavalry horses, close cropped and groomed, and of kicking, shaggy, Cossack ponies was returning from the river. Tranquillity, sad and solemn, reigned in the camp. The sky was lit up with a ruddy glare. The day had drawn to a close, but it seemed reluctant to depart. Like one leaving a spot with fond associations, it kept turning back to give a last, lingering look. The report of the evening-gun rang out, the drums beat a rapid "good night," the trumpets sounded a sonorous "sleep well," mounted patrols were sent out. The Uhlans' plumes fluttered over their helmets, the Cossacks in their blue tunics, sheepskin caps and long black lances looked like flying shadows. Far out on the horizon the last rays of the sun merged with the sultry, purple dusk. A rosy mist hung over the river. What a day! What an evening!

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* Verst—about two-thirds of a mile.

Muratov threw his reins over the neck of his horse, a splendid charger which he had named "Cuirassier" because of its tremendous proportions. Another horse could not have carried this gigantic rider. The Lieutenant looked round and smiled, not knowing why, but it was a smile of joy and infinite happiness. Riding out of the camp he was overtaken by a Sub-Lieutenant of the 5th Chasseur Regiment, also on horseback. This officer was very young, still quite a boy, with a face that was strangely attractive and yet repellent, like the face of a child painted to look like that of an old man.

"Muratov!" he cried, spurring on his short mare. "Let's ride together. Are you going to Headquarters? So am I."

"All right, let's ride together. What do you think of today's battle, Rayevsky?"

Trotting by Muratov's side the Sub-Lieutenant shrugged his shoulders in the way an old man does and for a moment he bore an amazing resemblance to General Rayevsky when that officer was plunged in cold and dispassionate reflection.

"What can I say? In the first place, the fact that the uniform of our Lithuanian Uhlans is almost exactly like that of the Poles counts for a great deal. The same blue and scarlet, the only difference being the colour of their helmets and plumes. There was confusion all through the battle, and we gained by this all the time."

Muratov briskly turned in his saddle and said:

"Nonsense! That doesn't explain it."

"Secondly," continued Rayevsky, "the Cossacks were splendid. They dashed forward not caring how many were ahead, or who lagged behind."

"Yes! They galloped so fast that the very earth trembled! God, how well they rode! But the *venter*! It was the *venter* that decided it!"

"Nonsense! A cunning Asiatic trick. A ruse."

"Ugh!" snorted Muratov in disgust. "What a queer fellow you are, Rayevsky. Why, the *venter* is a brilliant invention of Ataman Platov. Do you know what a *venter* is?"

"I saw one today."

"Well, you could not have seen it properly! A Cossack unit goes on in front to entice the enemy into an ambush. It provokes the enemy to attack and pursue it. But as soon as it reaches the ambush a shot rings out, the hidden troops strike the enemy in the rear and the Cossacks turn about and face the foe. Devilishly clever! I am carrying the Ataman's report to the Commander-in-Chief. In my presence Matvei Ivanovich wrote: 'The *venter* helped a great deal to set the ball rolling.'"

"Your Ataman is a boor," said Rayevsky contemptuously. "One day I saw a despatch of his on my father's desk and he had an 'f' at the end of every word where he should have had a 'v.' Since then I visualize his name as 'Platof.' What a fellow! Ha-ha-ha!"

"You are a spiteful beast, Rayevsky! What would it matter even if he wrote 'ph' instead of 'v'?"

"Ha-ha! I'll lay a wager, Muratov, that you are composing a poem about our Don Cossacks, and that Matvei Ivanovich flies from strophe to strophe on the radiant wings of fame!"

"Yes, so he does," replied Muratov sternly, "but not in my poem. Long dissertations will be written about the attacks of the light cavalry. What won't they write about them! But the mystery is easily solved: Kuteinikov's, Ilovaisky's and Karpov's regiments were in action. Vassilchikov led the Akhtyrkas, the Lithuanian Uhlans and the Kiev Dragoons. I was with them. It is obvious: the horses that gallop fastest, the riders who charge most resolutely, at breakneck speed, must win."

Rayevsky wanted to object, but before he could do so the riders were challenged:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

A number of lances rose from the rye in the wayside field. Neither men nor horses were visible. Cossack patrols always looked like that.

"The Commander-in-Chief's aide-de-camp. No counter-sign."

"All correct, your honour," answered the Cossack, rising to his full height. He had a broad, red goatskin bullet pouch strapped round his waist with two pistols suspended from it. A carbine was slung across his back. He raised his hand with his riding whip dangling from the wrist to his forehead, whether to salute the officer, or to gaze at him more intently, was not certain.

"Evidently you are not finding things dull, my lad," observed Muratov with a cheerful smile.

"No time to be dull on picket duty. Pass, your honour, all's well!" the Cossack answered, smiling in turn.

* * *

The moon glided across the sky, now hiding behind passing clouds, now shining through the spreading branches of the birches that lined the wayside and tracing fantastic patterns on the road. A mist hung like a pall over the broad fields stretching on both sides behind the trees. Lightning flickered in the distance.

The Cossacks on picket duty were engaged in quiet conversation. A young Cossack, whose moustache had not yet grown and, consequently, was one of those who even when away from home refer to their parents from childish habit as "Mum" and "Dad," whispered to his comrade:

"Oh, how homesick I am, if you only knew."

He felt a thump in the back.

"Hey! Go easy there!" he hissed and jumped to his feet to return the blow, but pulled up sharply and spat in disgust. It was his horse, which had pushed its muzzle into his shoulder.

"I feel so homesick, Uncle Kuzya," he resumed. "Sometimes I feel I shall die."

Uncle Kuzya, as everybody called him, was a veteran Don Cossack, famous in his district as a skilful horseman. There were few Cossacks in the neighbourhood who could as skilfully as he pick up a coin from the ground at a gallop and shoot while hanging from the saddle in full career. And yet, Sergeant Kuzma Vorozheikin had long been considered to be round about fifty. His appearance, too, was remarkable. His moustaches reached down to his belt and his eyebrows half-way down his cheeks. From this hairy growth protruded a hawkish nose, and his two small eyes glistened like stars on a misty night. His teeth were white and sharp like those of a pike. Uncle Kuzya methodically struck sparks from his flint to get a light for his pipe and soon was blowing puffs of smoke into the darkness, causing the horses behind him to snort. Gripping the bone mouthpiece of his pipe tightly in his glistening teeth he said:

"Is that so, little brother? D'ye know what's making you homesick? Your home's in danger. That's what's making your heart heavy. They say that the French live ever so much better than we do, the rascals. But what of it? We Russians may be poor and stupid, suffering for the Tsar, but Russia's our home! These Frenchies may be very clever, but they eat stuffed chickens even during Lent, as if they were Turks. What do you think of that? We are fighting for our homes! Do you understand?"

"Of course, I understand. But can I get rid of my homesickness, Uncle Kuzya?"

"Get rid of homesickness?" the Sergeant answered reluctantly. "Well, if it's so bad you can't stand it any more, there is a way of getting rid of it."

"How?"

"Good God, he sticks to you like a leech! 'How? How?' Have you a pinch of earth from the Don steppe with you?"

"Yes. In the amulet bag round my neck."

"Well, mix it with water and drink it, and the longing will pass away as if it had never been."

"Well, I never! I'll do that! I suppose the Frenchies long for their country too?"

"They have no country. How can they have? They're just animals. Wherever they feed well they feel at home. Have you heard them cackle?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, are they human? No! Just carrion. The more we spear them the better for our souls."

At that moment the distant patter of horses' hoofs reached Vorozheikin's ears. He quickly stretched out flat and pressed his ear to the ground.

"Ehe! Two of them. Riding at a trot."

The young Cossack turned as pale as the dust on the road. "Who can they be, Uncle Kuzya?" he wanted to ask, but Vorozheikin looked at him so sternly that the words stuck in his throat. The sound of horses' hoofs became quite audible and soon both horses and riders were visible. One of the riders was a slight figure, but the other was a veritable giant.

"*Je meurs de soif!*"* said the giant.

Vorozheikin and the young Cossack noiselessly crept to the road, trailing their lances after them. "Frenchies!" was the thought that flashed through the minds of both the Cossacks.

* * *

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* I am dying of thirst!

When Muratov and Rayevsky had ridden a short distance from the camp their conversation took a serious turn.

"In the West," said Rayevsky, "life is planned in graphs and logarithms. There, men spend sleepless nights in speculation, putting nature to stern interrogation in the dungeons of scientific laboratories. In our country, however. . . . For God's sake Muratov, don't think what I am saying applies to you personally! . . . but in our country we have merely fits of absurd inspiration, intimate communing with nature, or childish dreaming on the green meadows of fantasy. My mother is a granddaughter of Lomonosov.* It would be interesting to know what my famous ancestor would have sung about in his odes if he were alive today? But perhaps, like the old fogies of today, he would be engaged in the stupid occupation of counting Napoleon's sins! On my word of honour, the more people think about these things the less sense there is in what they say about them."

Muratov did not like the cold bantering tone in which the Sub-Lieutenant spoke. There was something in it that offended his simple-hearted ardour. Without noticing it themselves the officers began to converse in French, Rayevsky, because he found it easier to express his more complex thoughts in that language, and Muratov, because he was in the habit of expressing his deeper emotions in it.

"What a queer idea!" exclaimed Muratov. "Try not to think yourself, but don't advise others not to do so!"

Had Muratov not allowed his emotions to get the better of him he probably would have admitted that the ideas Rayevsky had expressed had never occurred to him before. His mind was so constructed that the winged dreams that filled it left no room for philosophical speculation. But everything was topsy-turvy today and he suddenly found himself defending the utility of sober thought from the attacks of the man who had roused these thoughts in his own mind precisely by attacking them. Probably Rayevsky detected this ludicrous side of Muratov's objection, for he laughed heartily, but this only served to annoy Muratov all the more.

"It is useful to think only in order to prevent oneself from becoming submerged in the refuse of life," said Rayevsky. "In all other respects it is as useless as blowing dust from a writing table, because it will certainly become covered with dust again. For some people, however, thinking is the same as not thinking. They gain little from it themselves and cause no loss to others."

This audacious utterance of Rayevsky's acted like a cold douche upon Muratov's anger and vexation. "No, I cannot argue with this stripling!" he thought to himself. "Oh, if only we were matched in heart and soul!"

"God knows what will become of you, Rayevsky," he said quietly, "but I feel sorry for you. You will never know the joy of life because your soul is dead. You will find life dull, very dull."

Rayevsky's face became contorted as if in pain, but his voice remained calm.

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* Famous Russian scientist and poet.

"I hate to have people feeling sorry for me, and it is hard for me to appreciate your kindness, Muratov," he said. "Life can be enjoyed only by those who do not prize it. I am one of that number. Hence. . . ."

He paused and then added, this time in a grave tone:

"But perhaps you should pity me, Muratov! I deserve to be pitied for having been born without knowing why. My parents thanked God not knowing what for. How stupid! Pity me, if you wish to. It is surprising that we have not quarrelled today. *Cela tient du prodige!*"*

Muratov felt embarrassed and depressed. No, he and Rayevsky would never understand each other! And to put an end to this conversation he said:

"*Je meurs de soif!*"

Rayevsky made no reply. Letting his reins fall he dropped behind.

Suddenly his mare swerved and nearly threw him from the saddle.

Muratov cried out: "Oh, my God!"

Rayevsky saw a lance sticking between Muratov's shoulder blades and protruding from his chest, from which a dark red stream of blood was oozing.

Vorozheikin had crept up to the officers and taking them for Frenchmen, had thrust his lance through Muratov's back.

Emitting a rattling sound from his throat, Muratov slipped from his horse. Rayevsky caught him with one hand and held the swaying lance with the other. "Shall I pull it out?" he asked himself. He made an effort to do so, but he lacked both the determination and the strength. The heavy weapon had become so tightly embedded that it would not move an inch. Muratov shuddered; his face became pallid with pain.

"Don't!" he groaned in a voice that was as soundless as falling ashes. "Oh, don't!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

To Her Highness, Anna Dmitrievna Muratova,
in the city of St. Petersburg, at the Five Corners,
in the House of Mme. Lezzano.

Netty, my dear sister!

I do not know how to begin. I cannot find the words. Our country is at war. You are a Russian. Strengthen your heart with courage. Sacrifice is inevitable—without it there is neither honour, glory nor salvation. Last night Paul was brought to us severely wounded. Friendship fears no test. I shall remember the horrible details of what has happened as long as I live. They are indeed horrible, but at the same time priceless. Tears relieve the soul—weep, my poor Netty, and listen to my sad tale.

. . . .

The officer who carried Paul from the spot where he was wounded lacked the determination to pull from his mighty chest the lance that was the terrible instrument of this sad blunder. The physicians are of the opinion that thereby he saved Paul's life for the time being, for while the wound is closed the sufferer lives. That is why the lance has not been withdrawn even now. The officer's name is Rayevsky; he is the son of the commander of the 7th Corps.

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* It is simply a miracle.

. . . .

Paul's heart, as melodious as a nightingale, is never silent. How many times has he spoken about you, Netty! He is too feeble to speak loudly, and so he speaks in whispers. But cannot people cry out in a whisper?

. . . .

I picture to myself with horror what foolish talk there will be in St. Petersburg about the unusual circumstances of this accident. One of the finest officers in the Russian Army laid low by the hand of a fellow countryman! *Il est cosaque! Oh, sort injuste!** How many pretexts will this provide for regrettable tittle-tattle, as a result of which evil chance will be made still more evil. Indeed, such things can occur only in our amazing country, where we even abuse the French in French. This disaster would not have happened had we not been so alienated from our people. Shocking to think that we find it easier to speak the language of our enemies than our own. But . . . this does not prevent us from hating the French and fighting them in the Russian way! Not in the least! Who is right and who is wrong? I cannot say! My thoughts are confused. . . .

. . . .

Count de Saint-Priest, the Chief of Staff of our Army, attempted to ascertain from Paul the name of the Cossack who injured him. But how should Paul know his name?

"At all events, my poor friend, describe the scoundrel to me," pleaded the Count.

A smile, a bright and benevolent smile lit up Paul's suffering face.

"I cannot recall his features," he said. "It was dark. . . . I do not remember, Count."

But when I bent over him several minutes later he whispered, so low that I could scarcely hear:

"I could pick the poor beggar out of a thousand."

Netty! *Je ne l'ai jamais vu aussi beau qu'en ce moment!*** Do we often see such complete and pure forgiveness?

You know how much our Commander-in-Chief loves Paul. He visits him every two hours, and the fatherly tenderness he displays towards the most devoted of his aides, and the fondness with which he kisses him and makes the sign of the cross over him moves one to tears. The gallant Ataman of the Don Cossacks, Platov, the hero of Mir, has visited Paul's bedside several times. He is a sly muzhik! Just now, as I am writing these lines, he is hovering round Paul like a willow leaf floating on the water. You will ask: why? I realized why the instant Paul, with his wonderful chivalry, shielded the man who had injured him. The more Count Saint-Priest is vexed at being unable to discover and make an example of the guilty Cossack, the more pleased is the Ataman. He is sly enough to conceal his real feelings, but I think I can see through him. Platov is so proud of his men that he would do anything to shield any one of them from trouble. It is hard for those without bobbed hair* to win his respect; his love they can never win. The only exception is Prince Bagrattion, whom the old Ataman worships.

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* It was a Cossack! Oh, unjust fate!

** Netty, I have never seen him look so beautiful as he did at this moment!

. . . .

Platov shakes his head sadly and says, speaking very, very rapidly: "An awful business, begad! Disgrace to the whole Don Force. If that rascal falls into my hands, by God, I'll flog him to death. With my whip! Without mercy! But I've no means of catching the rascal! Even if I examine every single Cossack to the last man I'll not find him. Here's an officer. I think it's the one who was there when the disaster happened. Hey! Lieutenant! Come here, please! Lively, now! Are you Nikolai Nikolayevich's son?"

"I am, Your Excellency."

"Were you there when the accident occurred?"

"I was."

And then followed something strange, oh, so strange. To give you an idea of what it was I will say a few words about young Rayevsky. Solitude in life, as on a journey, is often very dull. That is why people prefer to walk arm-in-arm, supporting, or at least encouraging each other. And each tries to thrust upon the other his wisdom, his foolishness, his merriment or his sadness. Such are the majority. But some people prefer solitude. Fate, which never enquires about our likes and dislikes, sometimes throws these people into lively company. But here too they remain true to their own characters; they march with the rest, sometimes even lead them, but themselves become more and more retiring and reticent. And the less they mix with people the more talk there is about them, always contradictory, and rarely true. They are usually accused of being egoistic, but this is quite unjust, for their egoism is no more pronounced than that of people less retiring. Young Rayevsky is precisely an enigma of this kind. I cannot become intimate with him, nor do I wish to; but I am disappointed at my failure to understand him. There is something in his aloofness that offends my vanity. Why? I cannot tell. Paul thinks that young Rayevsky is amoral and his mind vacuous. He is only seventeen years of age.

The conversation took place in my presence and I was eager to hear how Rayevsky would answer the enquiries of Saint-Priest and Platov. This is his answer:

"The scoundrel's outstanding feature is that his appearance is quite like that of all the other Cossacks I have seen. To this I would add that he is neither younger nor older than most of them. But I am telling you only what I succeeded in observing within the space of a few moments."

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* *I.e.*, without the hair clipped peasant fashion, *viz.*, the aristocracy.

You should have seen how Saint-Priest flared up!

"Go, Lieutenant! Tell your father in my name that the outstanding feature of his son is that he is totally unlike his much respected father!"

Rayevsky bowed and departed. Platov spread out his arms in sheer joy. Saint-Priest's beautiful eyes flashed with anger. As he passed me he said in a loud voice:

"These people recognize no law or justice. *Mais ils répondront pour la vie de ce pauvre Mouratoff!*"*

Who are "they"? I am sure the Count himself does not know.

. . . .

I have just been across to my so-called "quarters." The cow was mooing over the head of my bed. A cock was perched on my helmet, crowing with all its might. The goats were sneezing from the tobacco smoke belching from my man-servant's pipe. An omelette was sizzling in a frying pan on the stove. It is amazing that life can be simultaneously as peaceful and simple as it is in my lodgings and as frightful and complex as it is where Paul is lying. I hastened to him. His condition is unchanged. Many staff officers were gathered outside the room. As is usual in such circumstances, we spoke about him in a low voice.

. . . .

It is now evening. Paul is no worse. But the night still lies ahead, full of gloom and uncertainty. The mail is just going and so I shall seal this letter, Netty.

Your brother and friend,
A. Olferyev

June 29, 1812.
Nieswiez, on the march.

* * *

"And so we are eight versts from Slutsk and the French are already in Nieswiez."

Bagrattion thought for a moment and then, as if switching from one thought to another, continued:

"Well, that is as it should be. Nevertheless, we too, must take measures. Generals Platov and Vassilchikov! After your glorious victory at Mir I have complete confidence in you. Matvei Ivanovich! Larion Vassilyevich! On the way to Bobruisk we shall have the French stepping on our tail! The duty of the rearguard is to cover the Army. See to it, friends! If you leave Romanovo, the Army will lose its entire baggage. You must not retreat quickly. The troops will reach Urechye by the morning. You must stand fast at Romanovo tomorrow and the whole of the day after, and I permit you to commence your retreat to Slutsk only late in the afternoon of July the 3rd. Don't budge even if all the powers of Hell are hurled against you!"

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* But they will answer for poor Muratov's life!

The Ataman straightened his shoulders.

"There's going to be a fight! Oh, I love a fight! And promotion, Stars, higher pay from the Tsar. . . . And the praises that Russia will sing. . . , It's good to fight. Hot and dangerous? But where is it safe? Only by the fireside."

Vassilchikov gazed at Platov in admiration. Bagrattion, with a contemptuous gesture flung on the table a sheet of notepaper he had been fingering and observed with a touch of venom in his voice:

"The Minister for War has a bee in his bonnet and is constantly harping on it. He has written me again asking to be informed, if you please, how the Generals of the Second Army are disposed towards the idea of retreating. And so we keep on writing to each other, back and forth, and the correspondence piles up. It puts me in mind of the little fool in the story who cried out: 'The more the merrier!' at a funeral."

General Vassilchikov bristled up at this and said:

"I would ask Your Highness to assure the Minister for War that I am not one of those who are fond of voluntary and unnecessary retreats."

And Platov blurted out with coarse ire: "I wouldn't mind showing Mr. Barclay a nice fico."

Just then Saint-Priest entered the room.

"Muratov has just passed away," he said in a low voice. "He lived only half an hour after the lance was withdrawn, but it was impossible to leave it in any longer. I have made arrangements for the funeral. Two squads for the cortège; three volleys after the funeral service. Poor Muratov! But, Prince, I learned today who did it."

Bagrattion rose slowly and made the sign of the cross. Platov and Vassilchikov did the same. The Commander-in-Chief's features softened.

"God rest the soul of thy servant Paul," he whispered. "Oh, Pavlishche, my dear heart! And so you have left us! Your soul is hovering. . . ."

He raised his hand to his eyes, his lips twitched with emotion. The others stood silent with drooping heads. Several minutes passed. Still keeping his eyes covered, Prince Peter Ivanovich enquired:

"You were going to say something, Count?"

"Today I at last learned the name of the rascal who killed Muratov," repeated Saint-Priest, glancing at a sheet of paper he held in his hand. "Sergeant Kuzma Vo-ro-zhei-kin, of the 12th Ilovaisky Regiment. I must say that I received no assistance from anybody in my investigation, but I considered it my duty to go through with it to the end in order that outraged justice might be avenged. Thank God, I have succeeded! I hope, my dear Ataman, that you will now do your part and . . . do as you promised."

Platov was lean and short, but at the last words of the Chief of Staff he seemed to shrink still more. His face darkened, his head sank between his shoulders and the lively sparkle in his eyes died out. The Ataman felt very uneasy.

"Vorozheikin?" he asked, unconsciously playing for time. "Kuzma Vorozheikin? I know all the sergeants in my Force. I am a Cossack myself, and I have been with the Force for forty years, so I ought to know. But as for Kuzma Vorozheikin—never heard of him. Never seen him. Isn't there some mistake here, Your Highness? You know the kind of slips that occur in reports, don't you, 'Manuel Franzevich? Some fool of a clerk will write some drivel, or some spiteful beggar might even tell deliberate lies."

Saint-Priest shook his head and straightening himself like a proud cock answered:

"No, I've got it all exact, Matvei Ivanovich. Get your whip ready!"

Bagrattion removed his hand from his eyes. They were still moist, but his expressive face no longer bore a trace of his recent emotion.

"Whip?" he exclaimed in a voice that sounded like the crack of a whip. "Whom do you intend to flog, Count? And you, Ataman, what's got into your head?"

Bagrattion brought his fist down on the table with a force that made the inkwell dance. The ink spilt over Barclay's letter and left a shining black stain on it.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, Sir?" continued Bagrattion. "Flog a Cossack under present circumstances! What for? For a mistake committed during the honest performance of his duty? I might have made that mistake myself! Would you have flogged me? I loved Muratov. . . . But I tell you plainly: the Cossack was not to blame! Whoever heard French *causeries* at a Cossack outpost? Pineapple is very nice, but it doesn't go with vodka!"

Turning to Platov he asked: "What's he like, this Sergeant Vorozheikin?"

The Ataman had collected his wits by now. His eyes again twinkled merrily, and ostentatiously preening himself and looking at Saint-Priest slyly, he said with the precision of an officer reporting on parade:

"A reliable Cossack, Your Highness. The first in the Don Area. Comes from Ust-Medveditsa. It's not my fault that Count 'Manuel Franzevich failed to understand my joke."

Bagrattion waved his hand in disgust, which was expressed also in his face by a fleeting grimace. He realized that this was one of the Ataman's sly tricks that he never liked.

"You are very sharp, I know, Ataman," he said in a hard voice, "but you overdid it this time. You were too clever. I had no doubt that this man was a good Cossack; had it not been for this accident I would have taken him into my escort. And what were you up to, Count Emmanuel Franzevich? You spring a new surprise upon me every day, and I must tell Your Excellency as bluntly as I possibly can that I am beginning to get tired of them."

Saint-Priest shrugged his shoulders and exposed his small, close-set teeth in a strained and unnatural smile. He tried to catch Bagrattion's eye and on succeeding he said in a voice which, though calm, yet had a touch of venom:

"I am sorry I cannot anticipate your wishes, Prince. It is so difficult to do so that even Ataman Platov does not always succeed. Can I hope to excel His Excellency?"

He bowed and made for the door with the steady step of a man determined at all cost to make his back express utter indifference. The door closed behind the Chief of Staff. Vassilchikov scratched his rosy cheek in utter bewilderment. As usual, he could not make up his mind who was right and who was wrong in this matter. He had no opinion of his own, but a vague feeling drew him to the side of Bagrattion. Platov's role in the business confused and disturbed him. The Ataman spat out in disgust, squashed the gob with his foot in rough soldier fashion and remarked:

"The Count is offended, but why? Could I betray my own Cossack? God forbid! For ages and generations the Russian's conscience has been as wide as the world. A regular ocean! Some drown in it, while others sail on it with honour and glory. I heard that Vorozheikin was involved the very night the accident happened. I wanted to shield the Cossack, gentlemen, and so I covered up the tracks, mixed the cards, the best way I could. And I thank you, Your Highness, from the bottom of my heart for your swift, just and merciful verdict. It will be a warning to others not to speak in the enemy's language among their own people. It's a downright disgrace! All you hear is: *sam pan tre, makitre Marusya tre, Mikita tre-tre-tre. . . .* It's those la-di-das, may the toads eat them!"

Half an hour later Platov and Vassilchikov left the small white house in which the Commander-in-Chief had his quarters, the commander of the Akhtyrka Regiment mounted on a slender-legged, prancing charger, and the Ataman crouching in the saddle of his steppe pony, bending over its neck and swinging his whip Cossack fashion.

"I'll tell you what, Matvei Ivanovich," said Vassilchikov. "It's not convenient for Prince Peter Ivanovich to take Vorozheikin, but there is nothing to prevent me from doing so. Let me have him for my escort."

"I shall only be too pleased, Larion Vassilyevich!" exclaimed Platov. "Please take him. I'm always ready to do a man a favour when it is possible to do so, and it's not against the law. Please take him. I simply cannot refuse a gallant Russian General like yourself. Take the rascal!"

CHAPTER NINE

Covering the retreat of the Second Army, Platov and Vassilchikov, on July 2, near the township of Romanovo, defeated Marshal Davout's advanced cavalry units commanded by General Pszependowski. This was the second big rearguard action fought by Bagrattion's Army, and was no less brilliant than the one fought near Mir, but the results were more far-reaching. The Army could now safely advance to Bobruisk and thence to Moghilev. Before this battle it had been in constant danger of being overtaken and surrounded by the enemy. Bagrattion breathed a sigh of relief. He was aware that Napoleon had not yet left Vilna and was continuing to direct the operations of his Marshals—and of Davout and his brother Jerome, King of Westphalia, in particular—from that city. Evidently Napoleon wanted Davout to attack the Second Army from Vilna and Jerome to harass it in the rear. His object was to isolate Bagrattion's Army and envelop it. Prince Peter Ivanovich saw through the designs of Davout and Jerome and was not perturbed very much by them, for he was confident that he would evade

Napoleon's forces by a skilful manoeuvre and reach Moghilev. He was disturbed, however, by his complete ignorance of the position of General Barclay's First Army. On the day of the battle of Romanovo Barclay had withdrawn his troops from the fortified camp at Drissa where they could only expect to be outflanked and annihilated. Barclay had done right to retreat, but in doing so he seemed to have forgotten about the existence of the Second Army. His line of retreat ran through Polotsk to Vitebsk. Pursued by the troops of Murat, King of Naples, and of Marshal Ney, the First Army increased the distance between itself and the Second Army. While this movement saved Barclay, it created additional difficulties for Bagrattion.

Both Davout and Jerome committed a blunder: Davout by holding his troops too long in Oszmiany, and Jerome by holding his in Grodno. Then their advanced units were twice defeated by Bagrattion's rearguard. The result was that instead of annihilating the Second Army the French succeeded only in forestalling its arrival in Minsk and in forcing it to take the longer road through Nieswiez to Bobruisk. It was not this that Napoleon had demanded from his Marshals. Bagrattion had every reason for deriding his pursuers and for priding himself on the skill with which he had evaded them; but he could not do anything with Barclay. Barclay was increasing the distance between them and it became extremely doubtful whether a junction between the two Armies could be effected. It was impossible for Bagrattion to beat off the French and overtake the War Minister too. Such was the situation on July 5 when the Second Army reached Bobruisk.

Had it not been for Barclay's retreat to Vitebsk—which Bagrattion regarded as sheer flight—the Second Army's position in Bobruisk would have been rather favourable. True, the fortress provided no convenient means for defence. The eight poorly covered bastions, the round tower facing the river Berezina, the stores and a wretched suburb of wooden houses, were all difficult to defend, and were not even worth defending; but the river served as a splendid natural barrier to King Jerome's advance. Moghilev could no longer slip out of Bagrattion's hands. True, the French had appeared eighty-five versts away, but even if Davout's vanguard occupied Moghilev before Bagrattion reached it* it would be less dangerous for him to fight the French single-handed and force his way across the Dnieper near the town than to look for more distant crossings and in the end find himself between the armies of Davout and Jerome. Bagrattion, therefore, decided to fight his way through at all costs and, covering Smolensk, march to join the First Army. He must hasten, hasten. . . . Forty-five thousand men—few, very few. "*Yak kit naplakav*,"** as the Ukrainian soldiers put it. But never mind! Forty-five thousand men could boldly attack fifty thousand. The main thing was to keep a free hand. He must hasten!

So ran Bagrattion's thoughts as he sat in the evening in the drawing room of the mansion in Sapiezyno, Prince Sapieha's estate, three versts down the highway from Stary Bykhov. He had just brought his army here from Bobruisk by a forced march along the shortest route in order to bar the road for the French to Orsha and Smolensk. The house was quite a comfortable one. Olferyev had ordered the fire to be lit and the drawing-room was bright and warm. How comforting was a fire in a grate under a homely roof! The door was flung open and Platov entered the room. His face betrayed anger, and the muscles of his face could be seen working under the brown skin.

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* This is exactly what happened. On July 8, General Bordesoule, at the head of Davout's vanguard, captured Moghilev.

** "As much as the tears a cat can shed."

"I have news, Your Highness!" he exclaimed in a loud voice, striding across the threshold, swinging his arms and striking them against the long folds of his blue Cossack tunic. "Our Minister is a brainy fellow, I'll admit, but he is continually getting on the nerves of my Cossacks and making me wonder what he's up to."

With that he drew a sheet of paper from his inside pocket.

"Look at that, if you please. An order from the Minister. Just received it. May I read it to you, Your Highness?"

It was an order from General Barclay to the Ataman of the Don Cossacks immediately to leave Bagrattion's command and to march with all his regiments to Vitebsk to join the First Army. Platov sat down on a silk-upholstered divan and thrust out his feet, displaying his soft-leather riding boots. Prince Peter Ivanovich took the paper from Platov and holding it in his outstretched hand read it himself. He did not rave or swear. He simply bit his lower lip in silence. Platov knew what this grim silence meant. It meant that the Prince's wrath had reached the highest pitch and would soon burst like a storm. The Ataman felt very uncomfortable. He said in a low voice:

"I've been in the service long enough, God knows, and I know what it means to have to fight for oneself and others. . . . But life is a queer business, and I've not learned to understand it to this day."

He unbuttoned his coat and shirt and drew out a greasy amulet bag that hung suspended from his neck by a fine gold chain.

"Look!" he said with an air of mystery. "Roots! From my garden in Novocherkassk. From the Don."

The Commander-in-Chief's sharp eyes flashed surprise. "Has the Ataman taken leave of his senses?" he asked himself, and this thought seemed to subdue his anger.

"Of what use are your roots in this business?" he asked Platov.

"As a charm!" blurted out the Ataman. "There's nothing like a charm! This silly idea would never have entered the Minister's head if. . . ."

Bagrattion heaved a deep sigh, and with it, all the wrath that had filled his breast seemed to expire. His heart beat freely. The choking feeling in his throat passed off. He laughed loudly and heartily.

"Stuff and nonsense, my heart! A charm! Ha-ha-ha! Oh, you wizard of the Don! Ha-ha-ha! You'll be the death of me! Ha-ha-ha!"

His laughter was so infectious that even Platov could not withstand it and he too chuckled.

"Since we cannot cast a spell over the Minister, what else are we going to do with him, eh?" asked Bagrattion. "You tell me that! What a fellow!

Running as fast as he can from Vilna . . . leaving me with forty-five thousand men to save the whole of Russia! But even then he is not satisfied! Now he is taking you away. What a fellow!"

Bagrattion got up from the fireside and strode rapidly up and down the room, the folds of his coat fluttering around his knees like flags in the breeze.

"First. This has to be stopped! Hey, Olferyev!"

The aide-de-camp hurried into the room.

"Sit down, Alyosha! Write what I shall dictate to you. . . . 'To Monsieur Cavalry General Platov, Ataman of the Don Force. Whereas. . . .' No! . . . 'In view. . . .' To the devil with 'whereas' and 'in view,' Alyosha! Strike them out! Write it plainly, like this: 'Your Excellency is to remain with the Don Force in the Army under my command until further orders from me.' That's all! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. War Minister! Now listen to me, Ataman. The Tsar loves neither you nor me. Our fame is no gift from him—we won it by hard fighting and he cannot take it from us. You know me. My word is my bond. If you don't lose heart, don't take to drink, and don't go cap in hand to the Minister, I promise to make you a Count of the Russian Empire. Believe me! You'll be Counts—you and your son Ivan. And your daughter Marfusha will be a little Countess. But stand by me! Together we shall lay the French out and also make it hot for the Minister. . . . And then I will get you anointed from head to foot with the Tsar's gratitude!"

Platov rushed to the Prince and embraced him. Tears rolled from his small black eyes. Incoherent words fell from his lips.

"Don't!" said Bagrattion. "Let's do the job first and then offer your thanks!"

"Now for the second. Alyosha! Take down the following order to Rayevsky: 'To forestall the French troops who are now beyond Orsha by emerging on the Smolensk road and occupying the city of Moghilev, and also to prevent their advance on Smolensk and thereby guard the central Russian province, I order you, Lieutenant-General Rayevsky, and the 7th Corps under your command, immediately to undertake a diversion in conformity with the following plan. Tomorrow you will march to the village of Dashkovka, twenty versts from Moghilev, and thence, with part of your Corps, set out on a reconnaissance in force to the boundaries of the city of Moghilev. In the event of the city being occupied by the French, capture a "tongue"* and report to me the strength of the French force in the city. I, with the Army, shall follow hot on your heels and ensure you full *secours*,** if necessary. I have also ordered the Ataman of the Don Force to march to Stary Bykhov in order to join you. A bridge is being erected at Novy Bykhov to provide for the contingency of our attack failing. . . .' But I do not anticipate failure. Success is beyond doubt. Supposing Davout's vanguard has occupied Moghilev, how many men can he have there? Six thousand? Is that a lot? D'you think we cannot dislodge them? With God's help we shall! Good-bye, Ataman, my heart! Olferyev! To horse! Take this order to Rayevsky yourself! Lively now!"

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* *I.e.*, a prisoner of war for interrogation.

** Assistance.

CHAPTER TEN

The night drew to a close. Day broke. Never had the reception room in the City Governor's house in Moghilev presented such a strange sight as it did at this early morning hour. Men in general's and colonel's uniforms were lying on tables and on chairs lined up in rows, and many were stretched on the floor with their hats serving them as pillows and their cloaks and greatcoats as mattresses and blankets. Aides-de-camp hurried noiselessly across the room and cautiously opening the door leading to an inner room vanished beyond it, soon to return with the same air of mystery as if they were engaged in some conspiracy. In the inner room, brightly lit with candles, a bald-headed man of about forty, with puffy cheeks, a hooked nose and stern dark eyes sat at a table sorting out papers and irritably bullying his aides. This was Marshal Davout, Prince of Eckmühl, in the very worst of those moods which made service under him intolerable. There were very good grounds for his being in this mood.

In the first place, when King Jerome had found himself, for some inexplicable reason, stuck in Nieswiez and he, Davout, had sent him an order immediately to go in pursuit of Bagrattion, the fool had taken umbrage, had resigned his command and had left the Army. Evidently he was longing to get back to his throne! Luckily the Emperor knew too well what a blockhead and nonentity his brother was and what a capable and devoted commander he, Davout, was, to pay any attention to his brother's childish caprices! Secondly, and this was more serious, Davout's ceaseless bickerings with Murat and Ney, their squabbles and mutual recrimination, had at last brought things to such a pass that the Emperor had roundly abused the Prince of Eckmühl for his recent blunders. That's what he had come to! True, he had allowed Bagrattion to give him the slip, but he would like to know what other Marshal, more brave and determined than he, could have kept on the tracks of this cunning and resourceful foe in the waste and desert plains of this wild country! Still, the Emperor's sharp reprimand had the effect of stimulating the Prince of Eckmühl to overcome all difficulties, forestall Bagrattion, capture Moghilev, and with his entire corps cut off the retreat of the Russian Second Army. Which of the Marshals, intoxicated with their own ambitions and long treating the interests of their ruler with egoistical indifference, would have carried off an affair like this in proof of their boundless devotion and utter self-abnegation? Thirdly. . . . But the following is the story of what had happened that night.

On the evening before, Davout had sent out a party of six staff officers on a reconnoitring expedition. He had expected their return at night and had, therefore, ordered all the divisional, brigade and regimental commanders to gather, at dusk, in the reception-room of the City Governor's house, outside his own room. But not a single officer of the reconnoitring party had returned. Under similar circumstances, Ney or Murat, or that brainless Jerome, would probably have allowed all the commanders to return to their quarters to enable them to rest and sleep in their beds, but not Davout, Prince of Eckmühl! He was not that sort of man!

And so, his generals and colonels were still sprawling in his reception room waiting for orders, not daring to depart. Davout had no doubt that they were cursing him for his hardness and lack of consideration. But what did he care? Let them curse and continue sprawling on the floor. . . . He was no upstart like they, oh no! He was a cavalry officer, of an ancient aristocratic family, and it was not for boors like Desaix, Compans and others of that ilk to judge of the merits and demerits of his system. As for discipline, he knew more about that than any of them. Let them whisper among themselves about his austerity, hot temper and exacting nature—not one of them would dare to utter any of these strictures aloud. In spite of all the scandal-mongering and backbiting, the Emperor knew that he had no Marshal more efficient and devoted than Davout. And so, let them roll on the floor! Serves them right! But why have not the scouts returned yet, devil take it?

Just then an aide entered the room and announced: "Captain Pionne de Combe, Your Highness!"

"Aha! Show him in at once!"

The Captain strode rapidly into the room. He was a tall, dashing young officer with a dissipated face, which expressed a mixture of ingenuousness and insolence.

"What the devil kept you around that damned city so long?" shouted Davout, venting the accumulated vexation of the night upon the scout. "What the devil? And you always come back first, but empty-handed! I will put a stop to this! From now on you will command a squad, in spite of the rank you have gained by your shady tricks. I know all about it. What have you got to say?"

A member of the nobility himself, Davout could not tolerate the minor aristocracy, who were joining the French Army in increasing numbers. Being himself devoted to the Emperor heart and soul, he did not believe that they were devoted or even simply loyal. Something that he had retained from the past enabled him to peer into the souls of these men, and what he saw roused his suspicions.

"What have you got to say?" he repeated. "If you've come back empty-handed—you go to the squad!"

The Captain trembled with suppressed passion. Oh, what pleasure it would have given him to have replied to the abuse of this knave with a Marshal's baton with a resounding slap in the face! An insignificant Burgundy noble spits vile abuse, while he, Pionne de Combe, whose ancestors under Saint Louis were known as the Marquises Montresor, and under Henry the Fourth as Counts and Viscounts de Jumilhac, has to stand at attention and listen to it! Disgusting times! He had not returned empty-handed, only it was not easy to explain what he had brought back. The devil had indeed kept him a long time in the surrounding hills and wide corn fields in which wretched little villages huddled close to the ground like partridges. At last he had spotted two Russian regiments of Chasseurs cautiously advancing to the village of Saltanovka. What regiments these were and whether they were being followed by larger Russian forces he did not know, for, having a natural aversion to running risks, he turned tail immediately he set eyes on them and galloped back to the city. Had Davout not been so abusive, Pionne de Combe might have confined himself to a modest report of what he had actually seen; but the Marshal's arrogance and his own inability to retort touched the vanity of this high-born Frenchman and gave a fillip to his imagination. Moreover, he had not the least desire to serve in the ranks and command a miserable squad. Not for that had he bound his proud name with the fate of that brigand Napoleon and had achieved his captain's epaulets. Hatred and anger went to his head like hot fumes. "What will be will be!" he thought to himself. "I'll show you that I have not returned empty-handed. . . . I'll teach you a lesson, you Burgundy mongrel!" Standing stiffly at attention, he reported:

"The Russian troops are advancing on Moghilev from Dashkovka, through Novoselki and Saltanovka. Judging by the number of troops, this must be the vanguard of General Bagrattion's Army, behind which the main forces are following. Your Highness . . . ."

"Did you see them with your own eyes?" enquired Davout.

"Yes, Your Highness!" proudly answered Pionne de Combe.

"Thank you. You may go. You will lead the troops to the position. Adjutants! Summon the Generals!"

The Marshal had learnt from the scout exactly what he had suspected . . . and what he had feared.

* * *

Davout's infantry consisted of two regiments from General Desaix's division and three regiments of General Compans' division, twenty-five battalions in all. At 9 a. m. on July 11, these troops were led out of Moghilev by Captain Pionne de Combe. Shrugging his shoulders and looking round in apprehension, the Captain halted the troops about a verst from the city, near the village of Saltanovka. He would have gone on further, to the point where at dawn, he had seen the Russian Chasseurs, but at Saltanovka, Major Lemoine, an old and experienced commander of one of the infantry battalions, remarked:

"What a splendid place for a battle! Look!"

The Captain gazed around him. To the left, between its muddy banks, flowed the Dnieper. Ahead there yawned a wide ravine at the muddy bottom of which ran a winding stream. Beyond the ravine loomed a dense pine forest, and the ravine itself was spanned by a bridge and a narrow earthwork lined crosswise with logs. On the right stretched the sandy mounds of a barren plain which ran down to the ravine.

"Yes, a splendid place!" echoed Pionne de Combe, whose insolence was usually restrained by reason, that is to say, remained dormant until the voices of pride and vanity roused it. He trusted to Major Lemoine to understand these things and gave the order for the troops to halt. The sappers immediately set to work to block the bridge with logs and to cut loopholes in the walls of a log-built tavern standing on the edge of the ravine. A company of infantry occupied the tavern, thus converting it into a blockhouse. Davout rode up and galloping along the position barked approval at Pionne de Combe:

"A good position, Captain! This is your day!"

Pionne de Combe now triumphed over Davout; blind fortune had turned its face towards this descendant of the Marquises of Montresor. Nevertheless, the young man was by no means easy in his mind. "My day?" he said to himself, echoing the promising words of the Marshal. "I am not so sure about that, though," came the afterthought. "Where are the Russians? Where is Bagrattion? Where are the Chasseurs I saw this morning? There's no sign of them. Nobody, absolutely nobody around! God help me!" Despair and fear sent a cold shiver down his spine. Meanwhile Davout was giving orders:

"The bridge and earthwork are under our fire. Excellent! General Desaix, place your regiments on the right of the road, near the village! Three battalions here! What? Yes, in this open space! That's exactly what we need. Send one battalion to the windmill and four between it and that distant village! Two more battalions in front, on the edge of the ravine. That's right! General Compans, line up on Desaix's left. Five battalions in reserve, five in the centre and the last five near the city!"

About an hour passed in this work of disposing the troops. Adjutants galloped hither and thither past Pionne de Combe. Officers were bustling and shouting orders, guns and ammunition carts rattled and rumbled, and battalions and companies marched in serried ranks. Captain Pionne de Combe alone remained motionless, his face pale and his eyes riveted on the distant woods. There was no sign of the Russians. Davout galloped back to town.

"What's become of, those Asiatics?" growled Major Lemoine as he led his men to the ravine. "Suppose all this fuss is being made for nothing?"

Pionne de Combe's heart beat like a sledge hammer and he became conscious of a queer feeling in his legs. His feet felt the ground firmly enough, but above them, about the knees, he felt a void, and his body seemed to be floating in space, swaying and tossing in the waves of anxious anticipation. Suddenly he heard Lemoine's voice shouting in the distance:

"No! Not for nothing! There they are! There they are!"

Pionne de Combe dashed forward. The Russians were emerging from the wood in several columns, marching in close order. From their appearance he judged that they were the same Chasseurs that he had seen in the morning. In an instant the noise of battle filled the air. Guns roared, the rattle of musketry broke out. The Russians halted and stood stock still under a hail of shot and shell on the outskirts of the pine forest, facing the sandy mounds which stretched before them in an uneven ridge.

* * *

At midday the battle was in full swing. It was difficult to say whether Bagrattion's entire Army was attacking Saltanovka or only part of it, but the stubbornness with which the Russians tried to cross the ravine near the earthwork was amazing. Lemoine's battalion failed to withstand their terrific fire and retreated. All the Major's efforts to rally his men proved unavailing. The old veteran was beside himself with rage. His hat was nockked off his head by a bullet and he stamped and trampled upon it, furiously beating his grey temples with his fists. At this moment Marshal Davout arrived on the scene again.

"Halt!" he shouted pulling up in front of the men so sharply as to make his horse rear. "Hålt! Major, I want to put your gallant battalion through its musketry drill. It has never had any training under fire! Men! Your Marshal commands you! Present arms! Shoulder arms!"

The men performed these exercises amidst the hail of shot and shell as if they were on the drill ground. First one and then another fell, but the rest, ignoring the men falling around them and the danger that threatened them, kept on shouldering arms and presenting arms with clockwork precision in response to Davout's commands. But the Russian volleys rang out with increasing frequency, decimating the ranks of the battalion. Meanwhile, Major Lemoine, flushed with anger und vexation, was skipping round the Marshal's horse, expostulating in a thunderous voice:

"Your Highness! I ordered the battalion to retreat because my ammunition had run out. I swear this is the absolute truth! Spare the battalion, Your Highness!"

But Davout did not, or pretended not to hear him, and continued to drill the men. "The cur!" thought Captain Pionne de Combe to himself, fuming with rage. "We shall all be killed here because of his tricks." He bit his trembling lips, looked round furtively, and a moment later vanished from the battlefield.

Owing to his short-sightedness, perhaps, Davout did not see what was taking place on the Russian side. An adjutant rode up and reported:

"Your Highness, the Russians are crossing the ravine!"

"Major Lemoine!" shouted the Marshal. "Your battalion has performed its musketry exercises to perfection. Now take it and dislodge the enemy from the ravine. Charge, men! Charge!"

Followed by the battalion, Lemoine dashed forward into the thick of the Russians' fire.

* * *

Pionne de Combe stood in the depth of the forest, pressing against an enormous pine tree so closely that the rough bark scratched his cheek. The dread that had suddenly overcome him while watching Davout putting the men through their musketry drill under fire had not yet passed. The noise of battle reached him even here, causing a convulsive shudder to pass through his body as he pictured the scene. Suddenly he gave a start and began to tremble like a dog at the sight of blood. He dug his fingernails into the bark of the tree; he almost stopped breathing.

Across a broad glade, about fifty paces from where he stood, an aged Cossack was riding, bending low in his saddle. His long moustaches were waving in the breeze and his fur cap was pushed to the back of his head. Where had he come from? The Captain had not noticed. About a minute later several more horsemen emerged from the trees, their beards mingling with the manes of their shaggy ponies. Swaying in their saddles they rode at a walking pace behind the leader, making for the very spot where

Pionne de Combe was standing. Davout had been wrong. This was not the Captain's day. The poor fellow's fate was about to be decided in the most deplorable fashion. The Captain shut his eyes expecting to be pierced with a lance, or at least to feel the lash of a riding whip, but neither happened. Instead, he felt a heavy hand grip him by the shoulder, while another, more deft, was swiftly passed down his body, relieving him in a trice of his pistol and his purse. Finally, his elbows were painfully drawn back and tied behind his back with a thin cord. All this was done with such amazing celerity that all was over before the Captain had even time to gasp. The Cossacks gravely conferred among themselves in a low voice for a moment and then, at a sign of their leader, formed a ring around their captive and moved to the edge of the forest. So that was the end of his glory, thought Captain Pionne de Combe bitterly.

Suddenly, a crash was heard in front of the cavalcade, followed by a whistling sound which was echoed and re-echoed among the trees, from which leaves and twigs came falling like snowflakes. A thin cloud of smoke hung among the trees. Two Cossacks doubled up and slowly slipped from their saddles. They were caught by their comrades. A volley? Where from? A heavy blow in the shoulder from a lance caused the Captain to stumble. He fell prostrate, striking the back of his head painfully against a tree stump. The Cossacks, emitting a wild yell, vanished faster than they had appeared. Pionne de Combe rose to his feet with difficulty. His head and shoulder ached unbearably. He took several paces forward from the spot where he had nearly met his doom and stopped short, dazed by the scene that met his eyes. A line of French Musketeers, holding their still smoking muskets at the ready, emerged from the trees on to the glade and made straight for the Captain. Ahead of them ran Major Lemoine.

"What the devil!" shouted the old veteran on catching sight of Pionne de Combe with his arms bound behind his back. "What the devil, I say! How did you manage to get here, my dear Captain? My men are expiating the sin they committed this morning. We have dislodged the Russians from the ravine. What a tussle that was! Now the Marshal has sent us here. He is afraid of being outflanked in the forest. The Asiatics are pressing us on all sides and he wants us to encounter them here. But you . . . you? What are you doing here?"

No, Davout had not been mistaken, after all! This was indeed Pionne de Combe's day, and luck had not deserted him. All the insolence of which he was capable welled up, first to his heart and then to his head.

"Why am I here?" he retorted. "The Marshal ordered me to lead your battalion to the Russian flank, that's why I am here! But those damned Cossacks caught me. . . . Why don't you order your men to release my arms, Major? Oh, how my shoulder aches! No sign of blood, though. Well, don't let me waste any time. Forward!"

"Forward, follow the Captain!" commanded Lemoine obediently.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In the morning General Rayevsky set out from Dashkovka with two regiments of Chasseurs and two battalions of infantry. The weather was bright, except for intermittent warm showers of heavy rain. The small force marched at a rapid pace along a straight and smooth road lined with birch trees—which had been planted thirty years before, when Catherine II was still on the throne. The spreading branches gave the road the appearance of a long and leafy avenue.

The force was already drawing near to Saltanovka when it was overtaken by a young, blonde aide-de-camp in a Horse Guard's uniform, riding a foaming horse. His face was radiant with joy and excitement, his grey eyes flashed. It was evident that he was in that exceptional, very complex state of exaltation which a man feels only once in his life, namely, before his first battle. The aide-de-camp galloped up to Rayevsky who, after greeting him, enquired:

"What message have you brought, Olferyev?"

"The Commander-in-Chief's orders, Your Excellency!" answered Olferyev. "Assuming that Moghilev is occupied only by Marshal Davout's vanguard—no more than 6,000 infantry—the Prince deems it necessary that you, Your Excellency should muster the entire 7th Corps and undertake, not merely a reconnoitring action, but a direct attack on Moghilev."

Rayevsky's stub-tailed English stallion suddenly reared. The General struck it on the forehead with the handle of his riding whip and at once patted its nose, giving it its rein. All this was done with the natural ease of an experienced rider, and this roused in Olferyev a feeling of awe and admiration for the General.

"He has just learned that a battle, a big battle lies ahead, but he shows not the slightest concern," he thought to himself. "Not a muscle of his face moved. He busies himself with his horse, as if what I have reported makes not the least difference to him!"

"It will be all very well if the Prince is not mistaken, if there are not more French troops in Moghilev, and if Davout has not yet arrived there," said Rayevsky. "I will do my best! Are you returning *via* Dashkovka, Olferyev?"

"Your Excellency!" exclaimed the Cornet. "Permit me to remain with you! I am sure Prince Peter Ivanovich will not mind. Please, do, Your Excellency!"

"Nonsense!" retorted Rayevsky. "Why should you run into danger? You will have other opportunities, Cornet. And so, return *via* Dashkovka, and on the way call on General Kolyubakin of the 12th Division, General Paskevich of the 26th, General Vassilchikov of the Akhtyrka Regiment, and the artillery, and convey to them my orders to join me at once. Report to the Prince that I will do everything in my power, but that I am afraid his calculations are not quite correct. The French divisions consist of twenty-eight battalions as against our twelve. My entire corps consists of twenty-four battalions of no more than 500 men each. If we run into Davout, we shall have a hard time. However, go!"

"Your Excellency!"

"Cornet! Quick march!"

Olferyev saluted, turned his horse and sped like the wind in the direction from which he had come. Were he not riding under the gaze of hundreds of human eyes, were he alone on an empty road, he would in all probability have broken into tears and wept like a child.

* * *

Through the spyglass columns of French troops could be seen marching in serried ranks through the streets of Saltanovka, and also round the village, to the right, to the left and in the rear. The rain had stopped. The sun came out from behind the clouds and added brilliance to the scene. General Rayevsky kept his eye glued to his spyglass. About him were the commanders of the troops which had just drawn up—Vassilchikov and another young, lean General, with regular, but small and vivacious features. This was Major-General Paskevich, the commander of the 26th Infantry Division.

"Thanks, Ivan Fedorovich, for bringing your division up so quickly," Rayevsky said to him.

"We did not march, we flew, in spite of the fact that the men were in their greatcoats and carried their knapsacks and muskets," answered Paskevich boastfully. "They knew that their lives depended on speed."

Rayevsky removed his spyglass from his eye and gave Paskevich a sidelong glance, such as a wise old man would give to a boastful and thoughtless child.

"Oh, have you not yet stopped thinking about your lives?" he asked jestingly.

Vassilchikov laughed. Paskevich was about to reply, but evidently thought better of it and merely straightened up and saluted.

"And so," continued Rayevsky, "you, Ivan Fedorovich, take your division, and you, Larion Vassilyevich, take your Hussars and march through the forest to outflank the French on the right. They are about a verst from the road. When you reach their flank and come out on level ground, I will strike at their centre across the bridge with the 12th Division. To your troops, Messieurs Generals!"

* * *

The pine wood through which Paskevich was marching was so dense that the infantry could proceed only in open order, and then only along narrow tracks, three abreast. Vassilchikov with his Hussars had dropped behind long ago, for the forest had proved impassable for cavalry. The Akhtyrka Regiment had turned back, but a convoy of Cossacks, which Vassilchikov had kept back, managed to penetrate deeper and deeper into the wood with their customary skill. The flanking movement was probably half-completed when several Don Cossacks appeared before Paskevich riding their shaggy ponies and with the bodies of two dead comrades across their saddles. One of the Cossacks, a sergeant, whose eyebrows were so long that they waved in the breeze, rode forward and reported:

"The Frenchies are pushing forward, Your Excellency . . . no mistake!"

And to confirm his statement—Kuzma Vorozheikin, oh, so cautious, now!—pointed to the bodies of the dead Cossacks lying across the saddles. Paskevich was obviously disturbed by the news. Pulling hair after hair from his right whisker he enquired:

"Many?"

"Close on a thousand. How many there are behind them I don't know. Their Chasseurs. . . ."

The General's small, colourless eyes flashed.

"Aha! Clearly we are outflanking them on the right and they are outflanking us on the left! Well, let them try!" he muttered, and then asked Vorozheikin:

"Is there a road leading out of the forest, old man?"

"Yes, Your Excellency. It begins just where the trees thin out."

"Clear as a pikestaff!" said Paskevich, thinking quickly. "The brigade of Chasseurs will go to the right of the road and two regiments of the 2nd to the left. The artillery will proceed along the road. That will be the first battle line. The others—in reserve. In case of necessity—they will act as the second line."

The force was hurriedly reformed. The forest was beginning to thin out, but was still too dense to allow of any precise movements. The division gradually reached the place where the road began, but it was unable to take up the positions which the General had indicated. Three musketry volleys rang out. Fired at close range and well-aimed, the effect was devastating. A line of French Musketeers became distinctly visible in front. This was Major Lemoine's battalion. What was behind them? The thousand men, about whom the Cossack Sergeant had reported, or many, perhaps very many more? Paskevich betrayed still greater nervousness, as a result of which his side whisker became markedly thinner. The Chasseurs in the first line returned the fire of the French. The woods resounded with the report of volley after volley and became filled with acrid gunpowder smoke. From the glade to which the General had galloped the French Musketeers seemed quite close. Paskevich turned round and shouted.

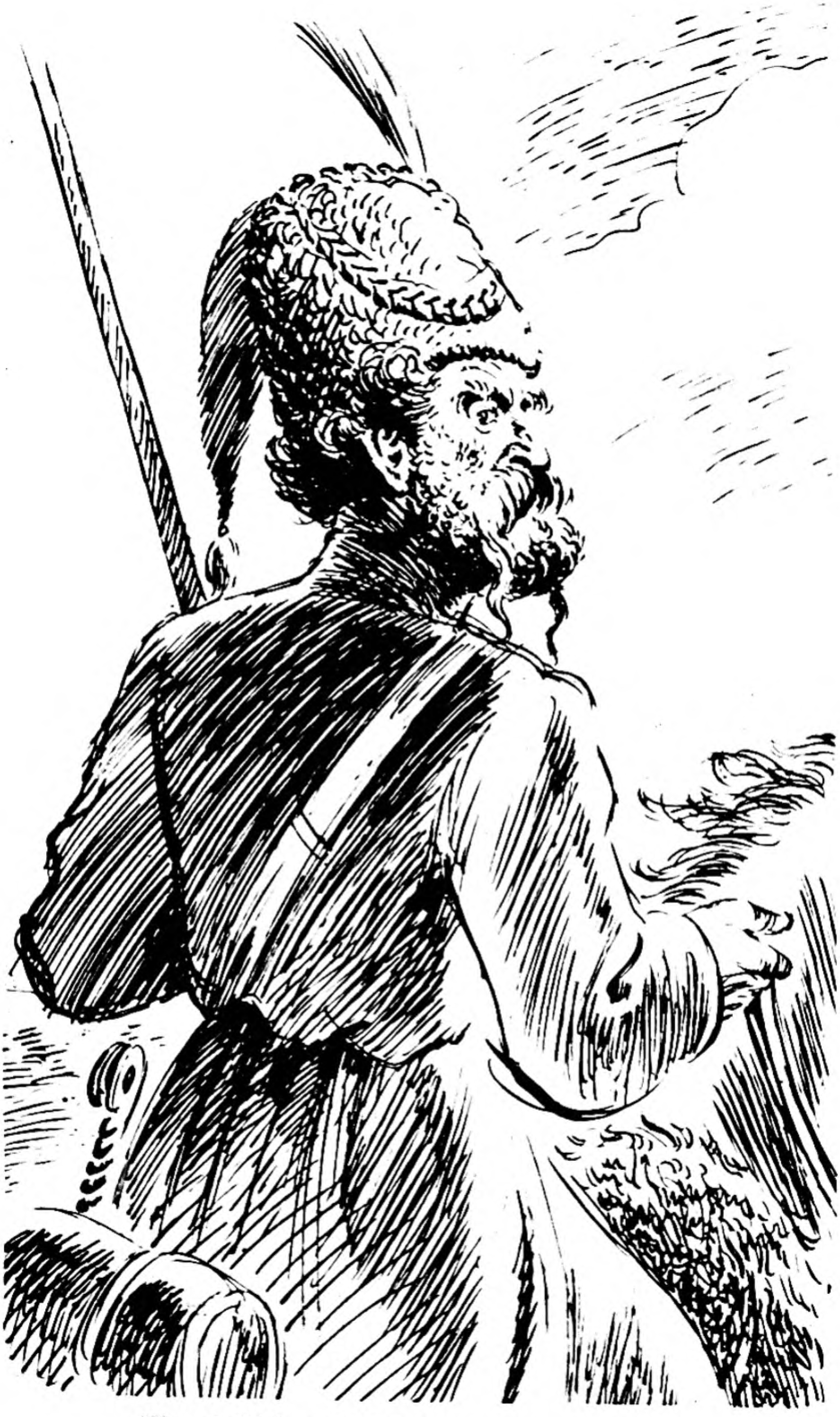
"Travin, haul two guns here!"

The Lieutenant in command of the company of artillery to whom this order was addressed, was of proud and haughty bearing, but his coat was torn at the elbows, his breeches were carefully patched at the knees, and his sword-knot, cords and the tassles on his helmet were worn and soiled. This officer was obviously very poor, but it was evident that his uniform had been made of the finest cloth and fitted him like a glove. Like its owner, it had probably seen better days.

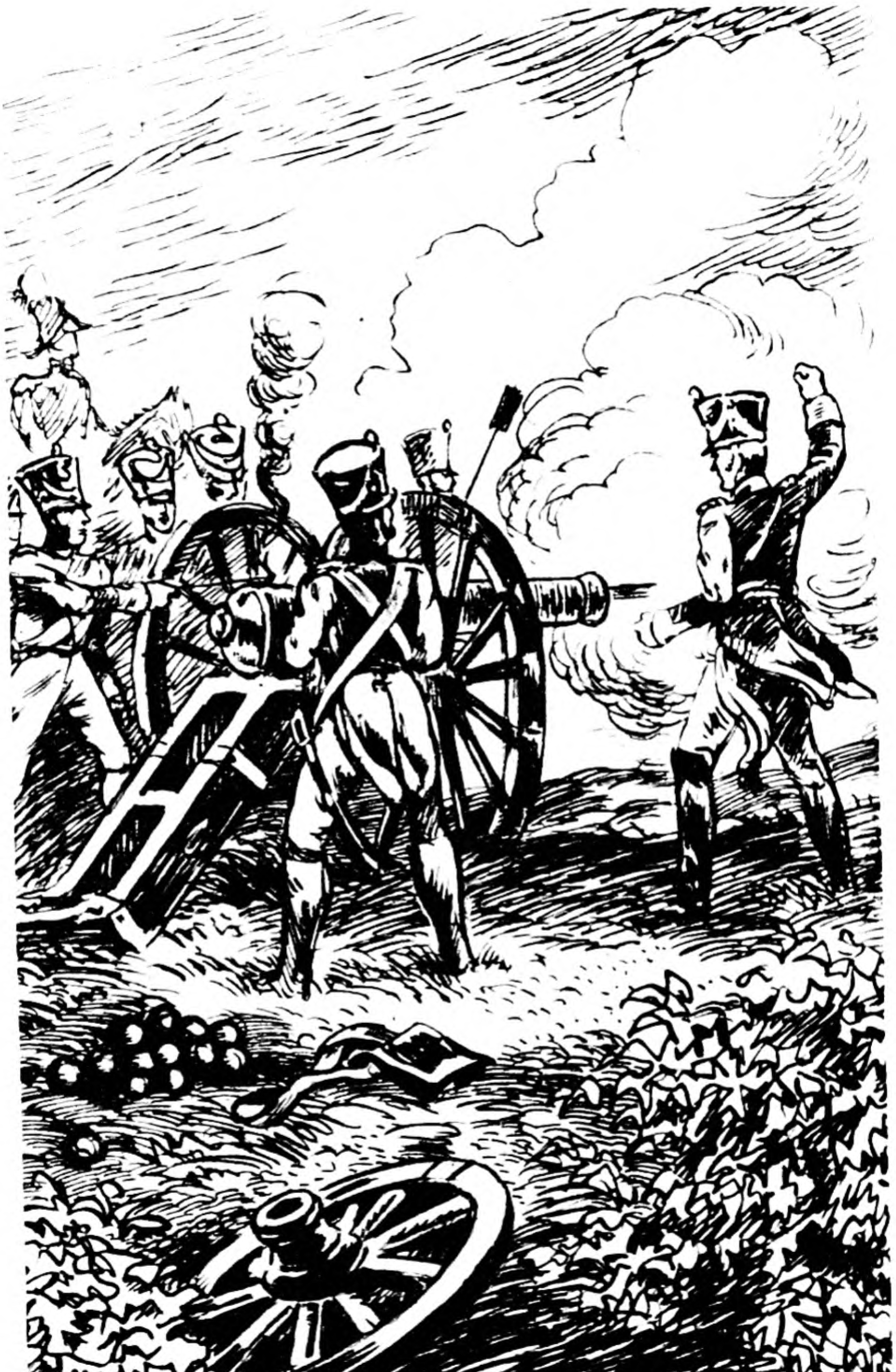
A couple of old six-pounders came rumbling to the mound on which Paskevich had taken his stand.

"Load shrapnel! Chasseurs under cover! To the guns! Fire! I shall have the regiments drawn up here in a minute. Why don't you begin?"

The guns roared and the mound was enveloped with bluish smoke.



"Vorozheikin's appearance too, was remarkable"



"The guns roared. . . ."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Paskevich.

But the scene which met his gaze when the smoke cleared away was far from what he had expected to see. One of the guns was lying on its side, and near it lay Lieutenant Travin's chestnut horse with its entrails blown out. The Lieutenant, his face deathly pale and bespattered with blood, was dragging his leg from under the horse. He was assisted by a gunner no less pale than himself.

Paskevich choked with rage and foam appeared at the corners of his mouth. He spurred his horse with such force that it leapt over the overturned gun and almost crushed Travin under its hoofs.

"No!" shouted the General. "Not you, but I am the fool for ordering you to fire! What? You're not to blame? Give me your sword, Lieutenant. You are arrested! I will put you on birch picket duty![*] Where's the gunner? What's your name? Ugodnikov? I'll have you flogged to death! Adjutant, put it down: one hundred strokes for this rascal!"

Meanwhile, the French Musketeers had approached so closely to the mound on which the General was fuming that their bullets were continuously whistling around and artillerymen dropped one after another. As the French were advancing in open order shrapnel alone could be effective against them. Paskevich pulled himself together. His rage passed away as quickly as it had arisen. "Was the officer really to blame for the fact that the gun, which had been cast in Catherine's day, had burst?" he asked himself.

"Travin!" he shouted, "Take four more guns from the battery and haul them here!"

The Lieutenant quickly unharnessed a horse from one of the ammunition carts, mounted it and galloped off to the battery.

"Four guns from the right flank, follow me!" he commanded on reaching it.

The guns rattled up to the mound.

"Halt! Shrapnel! Fire!"

The guns roared, but the French line drew still closer. Again musketry fire broke out. But in the Russian rear drums began to beat and the two infantry regiments of the first line advanced with measured tread straight at the French, their muskets at the level. Paskevich smiled, exposing his sharp teeth.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Lieutenant Travin, come here! Thanks! Adjutant, return the Lieutenant his sword!"

Travin accepted his sword with a bow.

"Permit me, Your Excellency, to remind you about gunner Ugodnikov," he said.

"What? Which Ugodnikov? What are you talking about?" asked Paskevich.

Travin returned his sword to the Adjutant with a bow saying:

"In that case I remain under arrest, but I shall not go on birch picket duty."

"Don't ask for trouble," the Adjutant whispered to him. "I shall delete those hundred strokes for Ugodnikov, of course, but don't kick over the traces.

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[*] *I.e.*, to supervise the flogging of men. Most of the officers regarded this as a humiliating duty.

"Keep my sword, officer," retorted Travin haughtily. "I shall not take it until the General finally comes to his senses!"

* * *

Of Lemoine's battalion only two hundred men were left. The Major looked round despairingly for Pionne de Combe, the Captain who was acting in the Marshal's name. He had led the battalion into this inferno, and it was his business to lead it out again. But Pionne de Combe was nowhere to be seen. He had vanished. Meanwhile, the Russian guns kept spitting shrapnel, and the soldiers dropped in whole squads.

"What the devil!" barked the Major at last. "To me, my friends! Let's turn back!"

But it was too late to retreat. The gunfire ceased. A loud hurrah rolled through the forest and the Russian Chasseurs hurled themselves upon the remnants of the French battalion.

Vorozheikin with a dozen Cossacks had been hovering round Lemoine for a long time and at last the opportune moment arrived. Suddenly, the Major felt a noose drawn tight round his neck. He tried to tear it off but failed. His eyes bulged and became bloodshot. His horse, tossing its head in terror, galloped out of the scrimmage, but was caught by Captain Pionne de Combe, who was watching the scene from behind a tree. He realized in a flash that luck was riding in that saddle. He mounted the horse, dug his spurs into its sides and galloped from the forest to report to Marshal Davout on the unsuccessful but brilliant vanguard battle which had been fought on the right flank, and on the heroic way in which the battalion and its commander had perished. He, the Captain, was the only survivor of this glorious engagement, and he had no doubt that this day the White Cross of the Legion of Honour would decorate his proud breast.

* * *

Paskevich put several questions to the captured Major, but the latter answered only in despairing ejaculations:

"*Ah, mon Dieu! Ah, Jésus, Marie! Maintenant tout s'en ira au diable!*"*

The General had no time to bother with the old veteran long.

"*Il veut paraître fou, c'est une canaille!*"** he said suspiciously. "Take the rascal to the Corps Commander. General Rayevsky will deal with him better than I can."

Vorozheikin led the Major away. On the road he said to his captive:

"Well, brother, what d'you think of Russia now? What the devil brought you here?"

"*Ah, mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the Major. "*La guerre est perdue, si nos braves troupes sont conduites par des vauriens tels que ce Pionne de Combe!*"***

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* Ah, my God! Ah, Jesus, Mary! Everything will go to the devil now!

** He is feigning madness, the cur.

*** Oh, my God. We shall lose the war if rascals like Pionne de Combe lead our brave troops!

Vorozheikin, of course, did not understand a word the Major said, but by a strange coincidence his thoughts also turned towards the notorious Captain at that moment.

"It's no disgrace for you to be taken prisoner, old man," he said, "but I could almost cry for allowing that lad to slip away. Perfect butter-fingers, my men were! But he won't get past me. By the Holy Cross I'll get my noose round his neck yet! On my life I will!" and removing his cap he made the sign of the cross over his chest.

* * *

Meanwhile, musketry fire was still heard in the forest, sounding as if numerous woodsmen were hacking away at the trees. Gradually, however, the firing steadily shifted to the outskirts. By this time Paskevich was leading his troops out towards the windmill, but on approaching nearer he found this revolving structure and its immediate vicinity bristling with the bayonets of such dense masses of French troops that he screwed up his eyes in amazement. "How is this?" he asked. "They told me that altogether there were only six thousand in Moghilev, but there seems as many against me here." A distance of only three hundred and fifty feet separated his force from the French. The place at which he had emerged did not permit of column formation and he therefore deployed his men in line, sending the Chasseurs forward. The Chasseurs went into action at once. Every man took whatever cover he could find, a hummock, or a bush, and creeping forward fired with steady aim, finding a billet for every bullet. Paskevich watched his men with pride. "Fine muskets! How well kept! How far and true they hit! It soon became clear to him, however, that it would be impossible for him to dislodge the French from the mill. "I will do all I can and then. . . ." he muttered. He caught his Adjutant by the arm and said:

"Gallop off to General Rayevsky. Inform him that I have not two but twenty thousand against me, and demand reinforcements of not less than three battalions! Lively now!" Turning his horse he called:

"Travin!"

"Yes, Your Excellency?"

". . . E-e. . . . Why are you without your sword? I returned it to you, did I not?"

"Gunner Ugodnikov, Your Excellency. . . ."

Paskevich tore his glove from his hand and flung it on the ground, shouting with rage:

"To the devil with you and your gunner, Lieutenant! Order him to train his gun on that crowd of horsemen on the left! There's a General among them. Compans, I think. Lively now!"

Travin dashed to the gun. A tall soldier in chevrons and with enormous side-whiskers—this was Ugodnikov—got busy, and a moment later a cannon-ball flew with a shriek towards the mill. The group of horsemen scattered. Three of them were on the ground with the cannon ball spinning among them.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Paskevich. "Splendid! Now knock that crowd off and there's a St. George's Cross waiting for Ugodnikov! Lieutenant Travin! Put your melancholy in your pocket. Here, take your sword! Blaze away with shrapnel! Messieurs, Regimental Commanders! Attack!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

Rayevsky, being rather hard of hearing, did not believe his ears.

"How many?" he asked again.

"Sixty thousand," answered Lemoine.

"What? So it is not only General Bordesoule's vanguard?"

"Sixty thousand, General. Marshal Davout's entire Corps."

"Send Monsieur the Major to General Headquarters and hand the Commander-in-Chief the following message from me," ordered Rayevsky, scribbling a few lines on a half-sheet of notepaper and handing it to his aide.

He realized now that he could not capture Moghilev, as his ten thousand men could do nothing against the sixty thousand French. After reading his message and interrogating the captive Major, Bagrattion should become convinced of the same; but the battle continued to rage, and it was as difficult to restrict it as to achieve success. Strictly speaking, the French position on the hill near Saltanovka was impregnable. The forest which surrounded the village blocked all other approach to it except by the highroad, on which a powerful French battery had been posted. Right in front of the village there was a ravine crossed by a bridge and an earthwork, both, however, wrecked and encumbered with logs. Different regiments of the 12th Division had launched several attacks across the swampy ravine, but all had been repulsed. Although their ranks were being decimated by shrapnel and musketry fire they did not think of retreating, but their attacking spirit was spent. They merely held their ground. Wrecked guns were immediately replaced by others, and fresh gunners took the places of the killed and wounded. Cannon balls tore up the ground in front of them, bespattering whole lines with mud, and, rebounding, flew over their heads, leaping and curveting in the most fantastic manner. The horses reared, neighed and sniffed the air, as if asking each other: "What the devil is going on here?" But the horsemen sat upright in their saddles, totally unconcerned. If a horse dropped, the rider calmly removed the saddle and saddlebags and went to the rear. The government paid for the horse, but not for the saddle.

For two hours Generals Rayevsky and Vassilchikov had been standing under fire on the edge of the ravine opposite the earthwork.

"Gunfire on the left, do you hear it, Nikolai Nikolayevich?" asked General Vassilchikov.

Rayevsky cupped his left ear and answered:

"Yes. That's Paskevich coming out into the open and deploying. Now we must rouse our men again."

"I doubt whether they will come up to the scratch," commented Vassilchikov with a sigh.

"What?"

A cannon-ball tore up the earth at Rayevsky's feet. He looked down at it indifferently and continued speaking:

"Watch those French Musketeers! What skill! They fire while on the move and have not once presented themselves as a target. It would not suit our men, though. So you say they won't come up to the scratch?"

He looked round as if searching for somebody. For whom? Behind him thronged his aides-de-camp, among them his two sons. Alexander was pleading with a Sub-Lieutenant of the Smolensk Infantry Regiment, a giant of a man with the face of a child, who was holding aloft the old, white colours of his regiment.

"Now look here, Lieutenant, you are wounded," Alexander was saying. "It's hard for you to hold the colours. Give them to me, I'll hold them!"

"Let me alone," answered the Sub-Lieutenant roughly. "I know how to die.".

And in that very instant his proud words were confirmed. He gasped and fell prostrate to the ground. A bullet had struck him between the eyes. Young Alexander Rayevsky caught the colours and held them as high as the Lieutenant had just held them before him.

"Do you know the Lieutenant's name?" he enquired of a soldier of the Smolensk Regiment standing nearby.

"Ziminsky, Your Honour! He was a good officer, God rest his soul. Still young, but quite like his father. I fought under his father at Derbent. . . ."

But before he could finish his story he dropped dead to the ground.

At this moment General Rayevsky's voice was heard calling: "My sons! To me!"

Alexander handed the colours to another officer and hastened to his father. By his side was his younger brother Nikolai, pale, but resolute. The drums beat the advance. The officers dressed their ranks. Vassilchikov quickly mounted his horse and rode off to his Hussars. The troops were imbued with that strange calmness that soldiers feel before an attack. General Rayevsky sensed what this meant. Sometimes it meant the calm before the storm, but sometimes it was a torpor from which the men's fallen spirit could not tear itself. What did it mean on this occasion? General Rayevsky waved his handkerchief. The orders of the regimental commanders were repeated in the battalions and carried down to the companies.

"By the right! To the attack! March!"

But not a man moved. What if Vassilchikov was right? Rayevsky took each of his sons by the hand and advancing with them to the earthwork cried out: "Staff officers, follow me!"

He was already so far in advance of the first line that this spectacle of unwavering courage was distinctly seen at every point of the dispositions of the Russian troops. He continued to advance, turning round now and again and shouting:

"Lads! I am your General, and my sons are with me! Forward! Forward!"

A wave of horror and enthusiasm swept through the ranks. All those standing along the ravine right up to the forest shuddered, and then dashed after Rayevsky and his sons. The latter were already on the earthwork, striding over dead bodies, broken gun wheels and scattered obstacles. As they were in front, the Russian troops held their fire, but thousands of men rushed forward with fixed bayonets. A hellish fire met this amazing attack. Hundreds fell, but the rest swept madly on.

* * *

But this time too the frontal attack was repulsed. The Russian troops retired from the earthwork plastered with mud and blood. Only on the flanks was fighting still proceeding.

"By the right, in threes, march!" commanded General Vassilchikov, and his Hussars trotted behind him. It was impossible for the cavalry to break through the dense scrub, but between it and the woods there was a broad clearing dotted with tree stumps. The Hussars advanced through this clearing in open order. They were met by a torrent of fire. Cannon balls spun at the feet of the General's horse. The General rode in front. He had not even drawn his sword. Turning in his saddle from time to time he looked back and commanded:

"Easy there, easy! Dress by the right, Hussars!"

It was as magnificent as any parade in St. Petersburg, but a quarter of an hour later the Hussars galloped back through the same clearing.

* * *

The white colours of the Smolensk Regiment fluttered and passed from hand to hand. Sergeant Svatikov, an old and ailing soldier, who had started military service under Potemkin, kept his eyes glued on it. He was completely out of breath from running, he felt a tightness in the chest and a severe stitch in the side. His legs and arms trembled from exertion and fireworks seemed to be crackling in his head, but he kept his eyes riveted on the colours. There! They have fallen, fluttering helplessly, and a crowd of French soldiers are rushing to capture them! But a crowd of Russians make a dash to save them. A scrimmage ensues, and eventually a red-haired Corporal, his face as radiant as a sunflower, triumphantly emerges with the flag. A moment later, however, a French soldier rushes upon him and attempts to drag him towards his lines. A crowd of Smolensk men dash after them, among them Svatikov, and again a fierce scrimmage takes place over the flag. The black flagstaff is broken. Somebody pushes Svatikov out of the scrimmage. Gasping for breath, he clings to the colours, but a stunning blow in the jaw knocks him off his feet. His mouth and throat are filled with hot, salty blood. He spits out the crimson mess, and with it something that glistens white. Teeth? Svatikov winds the colours round his head and makes for the forest.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon a messenger from Paskevich galloped up to Rayevsky and reported that the 26th Division was retreating with the enemy close on its heels.

"Tell the General that my attacks have also been repulsed," answered Rayevsky, "I am waiting for the order to retreat. Say that Moghilev has been lost, but we have gained a day."

The messenger did not understand the General, and fearing that he had not heard correctly stood blinking his eyes in embarrassment.

"Yes," repeated Rayevsky, "we have gained a whole day. Tell him that."

* * *

Bagrattion with his Staff was on the roadside under the birches when Rayevsky returned from Saltanovka after withdrawing his 7th Corps to Dashkovka. The two Generals embraced. The staff officers pressed closely around them.

"We have fought the first pitched battle in the 1812 campaign!" exclaimed Bagrattion. "We hit them straight from the shoulder, Nikolai Nikolayevich, my heart, and we have shown the French the stuff we are made of! Oh, how my hands itched! But I managed to restrain myself. Glory to the hero."

"This day all were heroes!" replied Rayevsky. Nevertheless, he looked sad and was evidently depressed by the setback. Bagrattion took him by the arm and said:

"We were mistaken. Davout himself was in Moghilev. Moreover, Marshal Mortier is marching to reinforce him. An overwhelming superiority of forces. Moghilev is lost, but I am not despondent. Not a bit!"

Leading Rayevsky aside he continued:

"I will not conceal it from you, my heart, but will tell you honestly that my ardour for a general engagement has subsided. It is no use rushing like a bull at a gate. An army is a sacred thing and must not be subjected to risk."

Rayevsky heard these words with amazement. What had become of the vice of which Bagrattion's enemies accused him—his rash and headstrong impetuosity?

"What? You don't recognize the old man?" continued Bagrattion in a bantering tone. "You don't know him well enough. Live and learn. Even Suvorov learned a lesson in Italy, and lessons are bitter things. The battle of Saltanovka will be remembered for a hundred years. By it we saved our Army. We must resort to cunning for a little while longer and keep that bald devil Davout fooled and I have thought of a ruse. You are a hero. I want to have your approval. This is my idea. . . ."

He crossed his arms over his chest and supporting his chin with one hand thought for a moment, and then continued with the calm deliberation which had astonished Rayevsky.

"We are not strong enough to fight our way through near Moghilev. I have received information that the Minister is already approaching Vitebsk. To join him we must march through Propoisk, Cherikov and Krichevo. How can we do that? If Monsieur Davout is kept in Moghilev all day tomorrow—we shall pass. At night, past Moghilev, on to Mstislavl and then to Smolensk. How can we keep Davout in Moghilev? Quite simply. He must be led to expect a general attack by our forces. Having barely survived today, he will not go into action again."

Suddenly changing his tone he said with animation:

"Big men make big mistakes. The Marshal is now reasoning as follows: 'I have fought Bagrattion's vanguard and tomorrow Bagrattion himself will rush to attack.' Aha! He will send out a reconnoitring party to find out whether there is anything around. He finds that there is. Your Corps has remained in Dashkovka. Later you are joined by Count Mikhail Vorontsov with the Grenadiers Division. The reconnoitring party returns and reports: 'They are mustering.' If this is not convincing enough he will find that Bagrattion with his Army has started out and has bivouacked near Saltanovka, placing outposts right up to Moghilev. Again his scouts report. Hold on, Davvy! And Davvy will hold on. Ha-ha-ha!"

Rayevsky smiled and said: "Perhaps it will come off. Children are deceived that way."

"Not only children!" retorted Bagrattion hotly. "Complicated mechanisms always look simple, my heart. That is not all! In addition, I will send the Ataman with his twelve regiments to Moghilev. Let them race around right near the trenches. What confusion it will rouse in the city! And while the Ataman crosses the Dnieper at night and makes a feint attack on Moghilev, we will slip past. The bridges at Novy Bykhov are already erected! The road is open!"

Vexation and sadness vanished from Rayevsky's face. Bagrattion's manoeuvre was so skilfully planned in all its details that it did indeed promise success.

"Very good, Prince," he said. "It was not for nothing that I fought today, nor did you spend your time in Italy with Suvorov in vain. The most important thing is that you are learning even today. Very good! I sent you a French Major, a prisoner of war. It would be a good idea to din it into his head that we intend to capture Moghilev tomorrow and then let him go with this secret. He will help to confirm Davout in his mistaken views. . . ."

Before he had finished speaking Bagrattion cried out: "Hey! Alyosha! Bring the old Frenchman who surrendered to Paskevich today!"

* * *

Vorozheikin had not even noticed how his enmity towards Lemoine had evaporated, but having to act as his escort for the third time, he was conscious of a rather friendly feeling for the old Major and even felt a proprietory interest in him as his own prize of war. Hence, the Cossack Sergeant sincerely regretted the necessity of leading the prisoner beyond the lines of outposts and of letting him go.

Ragged clouds sped across the sky. The moon peeped out for an instant, only to hide again, as if grieving that there was no one to admire her.

"Ekh, old man!" said the Cossack to Lemoine. "Where are you going? And why? Don't you like our company? The war will be over soon, and I would have taken you with me to the Don. What a life you would have had! A perfect paradise! Isn't that right?" he asked, turning to his fellow Cossacks.

"Absolutely!" they answered in chorus.

"You couldn't wish for a better!" continued Vorozheikin. "And if anybody tells you anything different—spit in the rascal's eye!"

"*Bon Dieu, que me racontent-ils là, quand je suis affamé!*" * groaned Lemoine in reply.

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* Good God, what are they telling me all this for when I am hungry!

"That's right," responded Vorozheikin. "Let's finish the war. We'll kick the uninvited guests out, and if they like to stand round the gate trying to frighten kids and idiots, let them! As for the lad who gave us the slip today, tell him we'll rope him in yet. Seems he has no liking for shot and shell, but he'll not escape Vorozheikin!" You tell him that!"

The line of outposts had now been left far behind. The yellow lights of the city were seen twinkling in the darkness ahead and the distant sound of barking was heard.

"Here we are!" said Vorozheikin halting his men. "Well, as you like, Grandpa! But if you must go, Christ be with you!"

The ring of Cossacks around Lemoine opened and the Major found himself standing alone in a dark field. Vorozheikin turned in his saddle and struck his horse with his whip, quite unnecessarily. It was a sign that his heart was heavy. The Cossack cracks his whip most often when leaving home and parting with his dear ones. Could his parting from Lemoine have had the same effect upon him?

* * *

On the night of July 11 Marshal Davout received reinforcements in the shape of the French infantry from Mortier's Corps and the Polish Vistula Legion. This pleased the Prince of Eckmühl, for he had no doubt that Bagrattion would attack Moghilev next day with his entire Army. This alone could explain the battle that had been fought at Saltanovka that day. This battle filled him with strange forebodings, however. True, he had prevented the Russians from advancing, but the incredible stubbornness of their attacks, their devilishly impetuous onslaughts, their staunchness under fire and the fury with which they returned artillery fire did not please him at all. If the vanguard fought like that in a partial engagement, what will the general engagement for Moghilev be like?

Davout had begun to muster his forces in the city earlier in the evening. The sappers were working on the city walls and outside of them, digging trenches and raising bastions for the batteries. The Marshal's aides-de-camp had never been bullied to the extent that they were that night. The Prince of Eckmühl bounced in his armchair like the lid of a boiling coffee pot. And just when this feverish activity and excitement was at its height, Major Lemoine was announced.

Davout bounded out of his room to meet the unfortunate battalion commander and pounced upon him like a tiger. The old man's misadventures that day, beginning with the shameful retreat of his Musketeers under fire and ending with the annihilation of his battalion in the forest and his own capture by the Russians, had sickened him with disgust; but he was still more disgusted by the Major's return. How? Why? Davout's suspicious heart nearly burst with fury.

"You old rat!" he yelled on catching sight of Lemoine. "I thought you were merely as stupid as a horse-cloth. . . . But no! There's something else in the wind here!"

But when Lemoine managed to tell him, in a voice trembling with mortification, something about his adventures, and particularly when he told him that he had with his own eyes seen the Russian troops marching towards the city and had heard the orders of Bagrattion and Rayevsky concerning the attack to be launched next day, the Prince calmed down and became thoughtful. Even assuming that Lemoine had become a spy, the story he told fitted in with what was to be expected in the general course of events. And so, in a voice that was almost calm, he ordered:

"Put this officer under arrest!"

* * *

Pionne de Combe stepped out of Davout's room into the general room of the Marshal's Headquarters so radiant that the room seemed to grow brighter. On the Captain's breast glistened a brand new white enamel Cross of the Legion of Honour. The day had ended for him in the way fortune, whose favourite he was, had determined. On returning from a night reconnaissance and reporting its results the terrible Marshal had not raved and fumed as he had done in the morning. Oh, no! Pionne de Combe had brought him information which had proved more potent than the deepest prejudice.

The aides-de-camp and several other young officers in the general room thronged round the Captain and individually and in chorus congratulated him on the award of this coveted decoration. Many of them would willingly have paid for this little white cross with their blood, an arm or a leg. One of them, however, evidently more envious than the rest, enquired sardonically:

"Judging by the reception you had, you must have brought bad news, Captain?"

This man must have been very familiar with the customs at General Headquarters and with the character of the Marshal himself. Pionne de Combe did not deign to reply either by word or glance, but to remove any doubts that might have remained about his own merits he declared loudly and solemnly:

"Splendid news, Gentlemen! The Cossack Hetman with his troops has just crossed the Dnieper and is marching towards the city. The information I obtained this evening is as important as that of the morning. A glorious battle awaits us tomorrow, and every officer in the *Grande Armée* will have another opportunity to prove his devotion to the Emperor. . . ."

As he said this, the white cross on his breast sparkled with dazzling brilliance.

* * *

On July 13 Bagrattion's Army remained at a standstill the whole day. By this strange conduct the Russian Commander-in-Chief counted on utterly confusing his adversary. His calculations were justified. Platov's Cossacks pranced before the walls of the city from morning to night, while Davout galloped back and forth along the fortifications, expecting an assault any moment. But the day passed and nothing happened.

The Russian Army, however, was quite ready to march. The soldiers were not lying down or even sitting in close circles, as they usually did in bivouac, but were standing easy, smoking their pipes, their muskets by their sides and knapsacks on their backs. They were neither cheerful nor depressed; they looked as Russians always look when preparing for a journey. The dusk grew into deep, dark night.

"When the Frenchies wake up in the morning, won't they be surprised to find that we are no longer in camp!" said one of the men in a low, jesting voice

"Yes, won't they," somebody responded. "Won't they raise a howl! 'What's to be done now? Where's the enemy?' they will yell!"

Just before dawn the trumpet sounded the reveille.

Munching the rusks that had been served out the evening before, the infantry lined up without fuss or bustle, but the cavalrymen rushed to their horses, adjusted the saddles, tightened the girths, fastened the bits, removed the nose-bags and placed them at the back of their saddles, accompanying all this with the patting and slapping of horses' necks and sides. Every now and again could be heard the usual ejaculations of endearment that the cavalryman expresses for his mount: "Come up, my beauty! Go easy, lass! Steady now, high-stepper!"

At last the Army set out on the march. It had bivouacked on clean and firm meadowland, the weather had been dry and so the traces it left were not very marked. In the morning the troops crossed the Dnieper near Novy Bykhov and came out on the Mstislavl road, which led straight to Smolensk.

The sun rose slowly in a rosy haze and suddenly shone forth with dazzling brilliance, as if showering its entire stock of light and warmth upon the earth. It was harvest time, but few harvesters were in the field. Crowds of peasants met the troops on the outskirts of their villages and women with infants in their arms gazed sympathetically at the dusty and perspiring soldiers marching past them. The local squires, riding in coaches, carriages and gigs, followed in the Army's wake. Byelorussia was left behind, and everything indicated that Smolensk, the land of ancient Rus, was not far away.

Bagrattion and his Staff rode on the side path, compelling their horses to leap across gullies and bushes. The Commander-in-Chief was calm and thoughtful. Suddenly he called to Olferyev. The latter galloped up to him and saluted. Bagrattion took his hand and gently, pulling it down said:

"An idea has just occurred to me. Even Napoleon makes mistakes, but forthwith rectifies them. But Davout has made such a big blunder that he will be unable to rectify it as long as he lives!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The suburb in which the Commander-in-Chief of the Second Army had established his quarters bordered on luxuriant green meadows which were dotted with copses of leafy willows. Dressed in his favourite uniform of the Guards Chasseur Regiment in preparation for leaving the house, Bagrattion gazed through the window enjoying the beautiful scene presented by this ancient Russian town. The stout fortifications erected in the period of Tsar Boris Godunov, the picturesque belfries of the churches and the white cottages nestling among the orchards, all glistened in the hot rays of the brilliant morning sun. Prince Peter Ivanovich screwed up his eyes and became lost in meditation. A beautiful city, Smolensk, he mused. This was Russia, for which one was glad to lay down one's life, to shed one's blood, drop by drop, to lay down one's head right now! No, he would not give it up without a battle! The great day had dawned. It was all settled. Napoleon had been outwitted. His cunning plan had collapsed. Both Russian Armies were near Smolensk. Where, if not here, should the French marauders be met with fire and sword?

Bagrattion hastily put on his sash and hat and was about to leave, but, suddenly he paused. His face became overcast. He slowly folded his arms over his chest and stood motionless for several moments.

"Your Highness!" Olferyev deferentially intervened at last. "I am afraid we shall be late."

* * *

The City Governor's house was a one-storied, rambling building, with jutting wings which seemed to embrace the drive leading to the porch. Up this drive rolled Bagrattion's carriage followed by a brilliant cavalcade consisting of several generals, numerous staff officers, adjutants and a mounted escort, their horses' hoofs pattering like the beating of drums, their white and black plumes set off by the silver cords and tassels of their aiguillettes. Why this pomp? Prince Peter Ivanovich was not fond of such display, but he was not altogether averse to it. Today he needed it.

The circumstance was an unusual one. A senior General of the Russian Army, across whose chest glistened the azure sash of the Order of St. Andrew the highest order in the realm, was paying an official visit to an officer inferior to him in rank! Indeed. Barclay de Tolly was inferior in rank not only to Bagrattion, but also to Platov and to twelve other lieutenant-generals now under his command, and yet it was Bagrattion who was paying the first courtesy visit to Barclay. How would the Army look upon this? True, Barclay was the Minister for War and could give orders to Bagrattion, but it could not be forgotten that only five years ago he, an ordinary Major-General had stood to attention in front of Prince Peter Ivanovich and had respectfully accepted his commands. Should Prince Peter have regarded the orders of his former subordinate as binding upon himself now? The position of both Commanders-in-Chief was embarrassing and false. If Barclay failed to understand this, the pomp with which Bagrattion's visit was surrounded should give him food for thought. Prince Peter sprang from his carriage, stepped briskly up to the porch and beckoned to the chief members of his suite to follow close behind him.

Meanwhile, the front door opened and a tall, lean, bald General with stern and shrewd features and unblinking grey eyes appeared. He was in full dress uniform, with sash and orders, and held his hat under his arm. He limped slightly, causing the plumes of the hat to flutter. His shrewd Adjutant, who had planned this solemn meeting in all its details, had only just slipped this elaborate headgear into the Minister's hands. Detecting the Minister's intention to descend the steps to meet Bagrattion, he clutched at the folds of his coat to restrain him. All this was extremely unpleasant to Barclay and his movements betrayed the embarrassment he felt. But this awkwardness was not solely due to embarrassment or lack of dignity. On the contrary, beneath Barclay's modest exterior one could discern the firmness of one accustomed to command. His awkwardness was due, mainly, to physical infirmity. His right arm and leg had been broken in battle, and after the battle of Preussisch-Eylau he found it difficult to mount his horse without assistance.

"My dear Prince!" he exclaimed with that hard pronunciation that easily betrays the non-Russian. "As it may please you to observe, I was preparing to pay you a visit."

The Commanders-in-Chief shook hands. Bagrattion gazed into Barclay's unblinking eyes, but could read nothing in them. The War Minister's long, pale, wrinkled face was inscrutable. He handed his hat to one of his aides and placed his injured arm in a sling made of black taffeta. Was this play-acting? Perhaps, but the actions were courteous. Bagrattion was obliged to be content with that and tried to appear perfectly pleased.

* * *

Something, by no means lack of firmness, prevented Barclay from stating, right at the outset, that the Emperor had chosen him to command the two armies: and something prevented Bagrattion from waiting calmly until the Emperor's decision was officially announced. His vanity was extremely ruffled by this ambiguity, but what was behind it was still worse. It was painful and bitter to be the subordinate of a man whom one could not on his conscience regard as being superior to oneself. Prince Peter Ivanovich gazed at Barclay's bald skull over which his hair had been carefully brushed from the temples, and regarded the very colourlessness of the Minister's hair as an affront and as a hint at his own humiliation. "And this Quaker is to be in command over me!" he thought with bitterness and disgust.

True, there was some slight solace in the situation for Prince Peter. The clouds of grave responsibility that had hovered over him since the beginning of the war were at last dispersed. In the new situation he was relieved of the painful apprehensions which were now to oppress Barclay with redoubled force. He would now be able emphatically to demand what he regarded as useful and necessary—a general engagement for Smolensk. Hence, he commenced the desired offensive against the French by launching an attack on Barclay.

"I have no complaint to make against you, Mikhail Bogdanovich," he said. "You are the Minister, I am your subordinate, but I am compelled to say that to retreat further will be difficult and fatal. The men are losing heart; discipline is deteriorating. What a splendid army we had! But now it is worn out. Nineteen days in this desert, in the heat, on forced marches! The horses are exhausted. The enemy is all around us. Where are we going?

Why? I admit that up to now your manoeuvres have been skilful. Very! But the longed for day has arrived! We have effected a junction. We are standing together and Smolensk is behind us. We must now resort to a different manoeuvre, one less intricate, perhaps. A simpler one."

"What kind of manoeuvre?" enquired Barclay in a low voice.

"We must seek for the enemy and beat him before he gets to Smolensk! I am not complaining. You are in command! But I cannot permit the Army to be worn out endlessly. Put somebody else in charge and relieve me! I would rather wear a peasant's smock . . . a civilian's coat, anything, rather than this! This is my true and honest opinion!"

Barclay listened to this ardent speech with close attention, but his face remained as immobile as ever. Its inscrutability almost gave it the appearance of a death-mask. In his heart he felt unsympathetic towards Bagrattion, as, in fact, he felt towards all those whom he regarded as being less educated but more capable than himself. He had little confidence in his own talent and morbidly concealing this lack of self-confidence, he only grudgingly admitted the talents of his rivals. Modest and restrained himself, he never forgave blatant self-assurance in others. He had always felt a natural aversion for Bagrattion's impulsive and ebullient nature. Outwardly, this expressed itself in polite aloofness. The fingers of his sound hand drummed a march on the green cloth of the table at which he sat facing his guest, his head dropped low on his chest.

"I saved you, Mikhail Bogdanovich!" he heard Bagrattion say with that sharp emphasis that always irritated him. "I saved you by fighting my way towards you when you were retreating from me. . . . And I will do so again if necessary, but on the condition that you do not remain inactive. I can conceive of no other course, nor do I wish to. True, I lack learning and, perhaps, you may think I am stupid, but it breaks my heart to look at our Russian soldiers. In their own country, in Russia, they have become worse than Prussians and Austrians. That is why I say. . . ."

And in a state of extreme agitation he said again:

"I would prefer to wear a smock rather than put up with this."

Barclay shrugged his shoulders. He was a man who could size up a situation at a glance and foresee its outcome with the greatest ease and precision. He never became heated in controversy and never laboured his arguments. He simply said: "The result of so-and-so was so-and-so and the result of this will be so-and-so." He detested long-windedness, but this conversation with Bagrattion called for lengthy argument and such a lot of talk. What was he to do?

"I really cannot understand, my dear Prince, what it is you are blaming me for," he at last said slowly. "My manoeuvres were no more intricate or scientific than yours, and were no less dictated by necessity. I am ready to admit that your operation at Moghilev when, on July 13, you outwitted Marshal Davout, slipped past him with your Army and crossed the Dnieper, while he, learning of this only on the 14th, began to march on Orsha only on the 16th, was a splendid example of military tactics. And the fact that you reached Mstislavl on the 17th without further hindrance is also a tribute to your military skill. But be fair, my dear Prince, and try to understand my position. As early as the 12th, Bonaparte was marching from Beszenkowicze on Vitebsk, believing that I intended to effect a junction with you *via* Orsha. Indeed, I did intend to march to Orsha in order to join you at least on that side and bar Bonaparte's road to Smolensk. I informed you of my intention. . . ."

He glanced furtively at Bagrattion. The Prince's eyes were flashing and his lips were parted, ready to express the most emphatic opposition to what Barclay was saying. But the latter gave him no opportunity. Without pausing, he said:

"Nor should you forget that on the 13th, Bonaparte had already learned of General Rayevsky's retreat from Saltanovka, which left him free to operate against my right flank. I then decided to give his vanguard battle. On the 13th and 14th my troops fought Murat at Ostrovna and held up his advance for a day and a night. But this battle clearly proved to me that the First Army must proceed with all haste not to Orsha, but to Smolensk, that is, deeper and further. . . ."

Bagrattion smiled sardonically and, interrupting, said:

"In that case, why did Your Excellency instruct me to join you in Orsha? Is such hocus-pocus permissible?"

"It was no hocus-pocus, Your Highness," answered Barclay, still more slowly and softly. "By no means. To turn Davout from you I was prepared to accept battle at Vitebsk. Was it my fault that the position there was extremely unfavourable? Besides, on the 15th I received your report about . . . General Rayevsky's reverse at Moghilev.

"I tell you frankly, I felt that this report relieved me of the necessity of fighting in an unfavourable position in Vitebsk. Besides, there was no longer any need for me to give battle, for you were already safely on the road to Smolensk. Hence, after discussing the matter at a Council of War, I marched in three columns through Porechye and Rudnya to Smolensk. I succeeded in fooling Bonaparte as you had fooled Davout. After the battle at Ostrovna, Bonaparte could have had no doubt but what a general engagement would be fought at Vitebsk, and he began to muster his troops on the 16th. But suddenly I vanished! What could Bonaparte do? He halted his corps to give them a rest: Prince Eugene in Surazh and Velizh, Nansouty in Porechye, Ney in Liozno, Murat in Rudnya, Grouchy in Babinowicze and Davout in Dubrovka. But, my dear Prince, all this was done not for my personal benefit, but for our common cause . . . is that not so?"

Bagrattion briskly ran his fingers through his curly hair. Much of what had been obscure, depressing, and strange in the manoeuvres of the First Army now suddenly became clear and simple. Much, but not everything!

"But, my dear Mikhail Bogdanovich," he answered, "why did you not make an attempt to join me at Gorki on the 18th? That was the most convenient place for both of us. Why did you march straight to Smolensk, when we might have effected a junction at Gorki and barred the road of the French to Smolensk?"

A new suspicion arose in the Prince's mind and his pale face again darkened.

"Perhaps the defence of Smolensk does not enter into your plans at all, Your Excellency?" he enquired. "I think this is the fundamental, the most important question. . . ."

These last remarks were uttered with such heat and emphasis that Barclay realized that it would be impossible to tell Bagrattion frankly what he thought about defending Smolensk.

"The question is so important," he said coldly, "that it can be settled only by cold reason, without passion and without agitation. Hence. . . ."

"No!" thundered Bagrattion. "No! This time let us leave cold reason to poltroons. Let us feel and act like Russians! I have put you a straight question, give me a straight answer!"

* * *

Locked in the room, the two Commanders-in-Chief conferred a long time. Now and again the loud voice of Bagrattion reached the ears of the Generals of the two Armies gathered in the hall outside, and they glanced at each other significantly. At last! Peter Ivanovich's fame had imbued them with new hope in victory. His ardent persistence had won the sympathy of all. They could not hear Barclay's voice, nor did they expect to hear it; they were all familiar with the Minister's reticence and aloofness. Nearly all those present in that room were displeased with Barclay. This displeasure had lain buried deep in their hearts, but now it welled to the surface. They disliked their Commander-in-Chief so much that they avoided mentioning his name. When they discussed the reverses the Army had suffered they meant Barclay.

"It is rumoured that the Germans and Dutch have risen in rebellion and that the English and Spaniards have landed troops somewhere," said General Rayevsky to young Count Kutaissov, commander of the artillery of the First Army. "It is also rumoured that Bonaparte has hastened back to France. But I don't believe a word of this. I have lost all faith. . . ."

The Count's black eyes flashed. He turned his handsome head to Rayevsky and answered vivaciously:

"You are right, Your Excellency. Our lot is indeed becoming pitiful. There is only one man in our First Army who can be said to have precise information about the actual state of affairs."

"Yermolov?"

"Yes. Not because he is Chief of the General Staff, but because he is in correspondence with the Emperor, and because of his subtle and penetrating mind."

"He can draw rings round the most cunning of beasts," interjected Rayevsky with a smile. "He's smart, is our Alexei Petrovich. Why, here he is!"

A tall, broad-shouldered General, of almost Herculean proportions, appeared at one of the side doors. Striding rapidly into the room he halted, bowed and scanned the faces of those present with his keen grey eyes. His hair, combed upright, added to his stature, and as he entered he seemed to fill the hall with his burly body and vitality. Under his arm he carried a shako instead of a plumed cocked hat, and this seemed to clash with his General's epaulets.

"Gentlemen. I congratulate you on the receipt of news of the greatest import!" he said, flourishing a folded sheet of paper.

The Generals at once felt the warmth of his shrewd, keen and yet pleasant gaze. All rose and eagerly gathered round him. His plain and unassuming nobility, cordial manners, his manly tone and soft, pleasant voice endeared him to them all. Even the senior Generals treated him, though their subordinate, with friendship and respect, and those of equal or lower rank simply worshipped him. Yermolov embraced Count Saint-Priest, tightly pressed the palm of Ataman Platov's calloused hand to his breast and kissed Nikolai Nikolayevich Rayevsky on the cheek.

"Monsieur the Commander-in-Chief had just signed an order to the Army!" he announced.

"An order! What order? Tell us, Alexei Petrovich. Please don't keep us in suspense!" came from all sides.

"Permit me, Gentlemen," responded Yermolov, unfolding the sheet of paper and reading it: "'Order to the First Western Army. July 21, 1812. No. 68. Soldiers! I am gratified to observe your unanimous desire to strike at our enemy. I myself am impatient to do the same. . . .'"

"Bravo!" interjected Count Kutaissov. "Hurrah! The retreat has stopped! At the walls of Smolensk we shall wipe out our disgrace with our blood!"

His voice was drowned by an outburst of cheering, so loud as to make the rafters of the ancient hall ring and ring again. The Generals congratulated each other as on a church festival. They kissed as was the custom at Easter. They all realized that this long-awaited and emphatic order would not have been issued had not Bagrattion been closeted with Barclay.

"I forgive Mikhail Bogdanovich everything now," said Kutaissov, his eyes and face beaming with pleasure. "Everything! As for Bagrattion—glory to him!"

"Glory!" came the response from someone in a corner, to be echoed and re-echoed throughout the hall: "Glory, glory!"

A Colonel, rather stout, of medium height, with tanned cheeks, his whole body radiating health and vigour, approached Kutaissov and stood for several seconds gazing at the ebullient young General in silent curiosity. A haughty and condescending smile played about his full, red lips, expressing at once astonishment at the Count's naive ingenuousness, and pity, which his hauteur could not conceal. The Colonel's bearing was rather strange, not at all in keeping with his humble rank. This was Tol, the Quartermaster-General of the First Army, Barclay's favourite, and the executor of all his plans.

"Does it not occur to Your Highness," he at last enquired, still smiling, "that, judging by this order, the Commander-in-Chief has firmly resolved to abandon Smolensk without a fight?"

Kutaissov gasped with astonishment, and this seemed to give Tol the utmost pleasure.

Yermolov was standing near Rayevsky, his face frowning but handsome, as it always was when he was in deep reflection. But suddenly his eyes lit up and his lips twisted into an ironic smile, marring his features by the expression of forced gaiety. He stooped towards Rayevsky and whispered:

"Perhaps Smolensk is doomed, after all, Nikolai Nikolayevich. What do you think? Since that Quaker has yielded to Peter Ivanovich on paper, Smolensk is lost, that's certain!"

Just then the doors of the inner room were flung open and the two Commanders-in-Chief entered the hall. Barclay looked calm and business-like. Bagration looked pleased and even happy. In the presence of all Prince Peter shook hands with Mikhail Bogdanovich.

"And now, my dear Prince," said Barclay, "I invite you to visit the camp of the First Army with me."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Although there were large stocks of flour in Smolensk, there was a shortage of bread and rusks, so that every army unit was obliged to bake and dry its own bread, the Quartermasters arranging to have the flour brought from the flour merchants. Among these Quartermasters was Lieutenant Polchaninov of the mixed Grenadier Division of the First Army, a tall, fair, gawky youth, with a round, fresh face and with unruly curly hair clustering round his forehead. Now and again he pursed his lips in a tender, childish smile, and at such moments his rather ugly face became quite attractive.

For a whole year after leaving the Cadet Corps Polchaninov had spent his time in a peasant hut gazing across the boundless steppe and, at intervals, leisurely putting the squad he was in command of through its training. Meanwhile the knowledge he had acquired at the Cadet Corps gradually slipped from his mind. Algebra and geometry were the first deserters, and they were followed by the other branches of mathematics. Not that this left Polchaninov's head empty. It became, rather, like a library where the books were piled in disorder and the key mislaid. His heart, however, was filled with strange emotions which he could not name, and to express which he could find no words. He was overcome by elusive, fleeting moods, ardent and lofty, which floated and rolled within him like fog over bare, undulating fields. He longed impatiently for war.

War had come at last, but it had proved to be different from what the young officer had pictured it. Since the outbreak of hostilities the mixed Grenadier Division in which he served had been constantly on the retreat and he had not yet even set eyes on the enemy. He would have fallen into despair long ago had he not been kept busy by his numerous cares and duties as Divisional Quartermaster. He rose before dawn, hunted out reliable guides and sent them to the regiment at the head of the Division. Then he went on ahead to choose a position for a bivouac for the midday halt, inspected it, waited for the markers, allocated the places for the different units, went back to meet the Division and distributed the regiments in their respective lines. When all these arrangements were made he galloped forward again to choose a bivouac for the night. Often, very often, he was so busy that he had no time to take a bite. After choosing a site for the bivouac he made a rough sketch of the locality, allocated the places for the different units, galloped back to Headquarters, submitted his plan to the Quartermaster-General and received instructions. Only then was his day's work done, sometimes at one or two o'clock in the morning; but before turning in he would invariably write a page, or perhaps several, of his private campaign log.

In Smolensk, the Quartermaster-General's headquarters were situated in a rather large, log-built house in the suburb outside the Molokhov Gate, on the other side of the Dnieper. With great difficulty Polchaninov squeezed his way through a crowd of other Quartermasters into a room where Quartermaster-General Kankrin* sat at a desk handing out assignments and signing requisitions. All round the desk, on the right, on the left and in front, officers were pushing and hustling to get near him, flourishing requisition orders —those behind reaching over the heads of those in front—and clamouring: "The men are starving!" "We have no fodder for the horses!"

Exasperated by the din, Kankrin, bald and short-sighted, growled angrily, rose from his chair and threatened to leave and shut the office, but this only served to add to the uproar. Kankrin resumed his place at the desk and running his eye down each order wrote on it: "Issue half the quantity," and returned it to the applicant saying: "Get out of here quick!"

One of the most clamorous of the officers who were besieging the Quartermaster-General was a huge Captain of Hussars. When Kankrin took his order at last, he glanced at him sharply and said: "You've been here before, haven't you?"

The Hussar brought his fist down on the desk with a terrific bang and his bass voice thundered through the room in vehement protest againt the insinuation. Evidently he was an old hand at this game, for Kankrin, deafened by his roar and, perhaps, convinced by the proof the officer presented, waved his hand in disgust and obediently signed the second order. But the Hussar was not satisfied. His knowledge of matters concerning food supplies was amazing. He calculated to a nicety how much bread was wasted in cutting up the loaves for rusks, and how much waste was incurred by the friction of the rusks during transportation.

"Far more profitable to bake rusks straight from the dough, in slices!" he roared. "Look at these!" he added drawing several Vyazma biscuits from his pocket and throwing them on the General's desk. Addressing the other officers, among whom was Polchaninov, he said:

"You will agree, gentlemen, that there are lots of rascals and scoundrels around these days!"

In saying this he glanced so fiercely at the officers that some of them felt a cold shiver run down their backs. "Good lad!" thought Polchaninov to himself admiringly, and turning to an artillery Lieutenant in a patched and threadbare uniform, he enquired:

"Who is he, do you know?"

The artillery officer laughed and answered:

"He is Baron Felich, well known as a dashing officer. . . . Always in front in a charge. . . . Ready to share his last bite with a friend, but not averse to emptying his pockets at cards. A merry fellow. Bold, brave and shrewd. But there is something queer about him."

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* E. F. Kankrin, subsequently Minister for Finance.

"In what way?" asked Polchaninov shyly, glancing at Felich in the expectation of hearing something unusual about him.

The Captain's exterior was in keeping with the description he had just heard. His sombre eyes seemed to harbour turbid and obscure feelings. Traces of passion, now dormant, but not yet quenched, had left a gloomy impress upon his features.

"In what way?" asked the Lieutenant, repeating Polchaninov's question. "Well, in this way. Felich is an invariable participant in all the quarrels among the officers. First he sets them at loggerheads and then offers his services as conciliator, determined, however, that the quarrel should end in a duel. When the challenge is delivered, he has great pleasure in offering his services as a second. Many regard him as a dangerous man. Still more dangerous are the audacious tricks he plays at cards. For one of them he was reduced to the ranks, but he regained his epaulets at the storming of Bazarjik in Turkey. After that he was held for investigation for about three years, and had not the war broken out he, in all probability, would have been put away again. He is hard, vindicative and in the service—a brute. At the same time he is hospitable, throws money right and left, and is ready to do small favours. Some fear, others admire Felich."

"How is it that you know him so well?" asked Polchaninov enviously.

The Lieutenant gazed at the youth attentively for a while and then asked:

"Do you want me to introduce you to him? I can do that. But we have not introduced ourselves to each other yet. My name is Travin. Well, do you want to be introduced?"

"Very much!" exclaimed Polchaninov, blushing with pleasure.

Travin took a liking to the boy. How good it was to be as fresh and naive as he! Who would believe that he himself had once been like that? But that was many years ago. . . . And before his eyes there passed the vision of a sumptuous aristocratic house . . . a life of freedom and ease . . . his generous father—a thorough Muscovite, poetaster and tattler, and fond of gaiety. . . . He could see the long table covered with a snow-white cloth gleaming in the light coming from huge candelabra and cut glass. . . . In the centre of the table there is an almond cake surmounted by a sugar Cupid, and a huge bowl of grapes. Around the table are seated vivacious, smiling guests. . . . A dream! Nothing of it was left! This brilliant picture faded and was followed by recollections of his father's ruin, the auctions, military service and constant poverty and, finally, the friendship he had struck up with Felich, the frightful incident at the card table, laborious service as a private in Turkey, and the epaulets and patched and threadbare uniform gained by many years of suffering. . . .

"Introduce me to him, Lieutenant," pleaded Polchaninov. "I would very much like to be acquainted with him!"

Travin silently gazed through the window. The city, the river and the gardens seemed to float past his eyes and become submerged in the crimson vortex of the setting sun. Something in the past had imbued him with a sense of awe for the sun and he always felt somewhat sad at sundown. If only he had a close chum with whom to wander in the woods at a time like this! No, after all, he was not Felich. He had suppressed the Felich that was in him. Why should he subject the credulous boy standing beside him to this frightful temptation? He turned quickly and, taking Polchaninov by both his arms, said earnestly:

"You want to meet him? Don't. There must be nothing in common between you and Baron Felich. I shall not introduce you to him, and I advise you not to seek acquaintance with that man."

"But why?" enquired Polchaninov.

"You saw the way he obtained money on his assignment?" answered Travin. "He cheated Kankrin, and will pocket the money. Felich is a dishonest man. His god is money, accursed money, which transforms scoundrels into sages, makes the lame dance and the dumb speak, bestows life on criminals and kills the innocent. There is nothing too low to which Felich would not stoop to obtain a thousand rubles, which he would throw out of the window the very next day. Do you realize where this might lead you?"

Travin spoke in a loud voice, not afraid of being overheard. Evidently something of what he said reached Felich's ears. At all events, Polchaninov, his heart thumping with agitation, caught the menacing glare of the terrible Hussar directed upon himself. Travin noticed this and called out to Felich, smiling:

"Here, Bedouin! I see you are still recalling the Prussian officers you shot in duels in 1807!"

The Baron twirled his moustache and pushed his busby jauntily over his ear.

"I don't understand what you are talking about, brother," he answered with unutterable coolness. "All sorts of things happen in a man's life!" And then, turning away, he sang in a low bass voice:

I feel so lonely
On a foreign strand. . . .

* * *

Though the sun had not quite set, the dusk descended upon the land in long, grey shadows. The food assignments had all been issued, the Quartermaster's office was closed and the officers were gathered on the green engaged in animated conversation. Their faces were flushed and excited, their eyes glistened, their voices were loud and cheerful. What they had considered difficult, almost impossible, had come to pass. The two Armies had united! There would be no more retreats, of which they were all utterly sick and tired. Here were gathered officers from both Armies, but the joy they all felt caused their voices to mingle in a single chorus of exultation. Polchaninov too was agog with excitement. A lump rose in his throat, causing him both pleasure and pain. Like most of the officers of the First Army he disliked Barclay. While still at the Cadet Corps his hero, the first and only one, towering head and shoulders above all Plutarch's men of ancient fame, was Bagration. That's the man he would rush to death for without a moment's hesitation!!! Thank God! Bagrattion would hustle, push and pull Barclay with him!

"We shall not leave Smolensk now, shall we?" he asked Travin. "Bagrattion will not permit it, will he?"

Travin shrugged his shoulders and answered:

"The other day I put the same question to Alexander, General Rayevsky's son. . . . "

"The one who went into the attack with his father and brother at Saltanovka?" interrupted Polchaninov.

"Yes, and so became famous throughout Russia. It is easy for him to obtain information, being always with his father. . . ."

"Well, what did Rayevsky tell you?" enquired Polchaninov.

"Nothing. He merely gave me a copy of a letter about Bagrattion which he had obtained from the Prince's aide-de-camp who was killed. He makes copies of this letter and hands them round among his acquaintances, hoping to rouse the spirit of the troops in that way. I think his calculations are correct. Incidentally, I will give you my copy if you like, Polchaninov."

"Do, old man, I shall be awfully grateful!" answered the young Lieutenant.

But these two were not the only officers who were discussing Battaglia's letter. Obviously Alexander Rayevsky had been extremely active, for quite a number were seen holding sheets of paper covered with writing in a small and even hand, and soon everybody was talking about the letter. Felich's mighty voice could be heard roaring above the rest:

"I never steal, I am indifferent to food, and I am not proud, consequently I miss the greatest pleasures of life. But kind fate has rewarded me with pleasure surpassing all others. I have already taken part in two campaigns under Bagrattion, and this is the third. This is my luck, gentlemen! When lightning strikes a mountain it, and not the mountain, is shattered. Bagrattion is as indomitable as that mountain! Eaglets flying behind their mighty father, soaring above the clouds—that's what we are! He is a Prince, I a Baron. . . ."

Travin laughed maliciously and said:

"The Bedouin has allowed his tongue to run away with him as usual. We must pull him up!"

"I did not say this out of pride!" continued Felich. "I know *ce n'est point la naissance, c'est la seule vertu qui fait leur différence. . . .*" * Bagrattion was born in the purple toga of the conqueror!" Suddenly turning to Travin he bawled angrily: "Hey, Travin! How dare you keep your hands in your pockets when I talk to you?"

Travin turned pale, but pushed his hands still deeper into the pockets of his rather faded pantaloons and, looking straight into Felich's eyes, said:

"It's safer for you, Baron, if I have my hands in my pockets."

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* It is not birth, but merit that distinguishes men.

Felich seemed to be struck dumb with astonishment, but a moment later his voice thundered again:

"A hundred and fifty thousand picked men such as ours . . . led by a lion who has sworn to die. . Who can withstand us, gentlemen?"

Hearing all this, Polchaninov felt as if the ground was slipping from under his feet. The faces, the uniforms, Travin, Felich—everything floated before his eyes like a mirage, curling and swirling like a dream. He felt with every fibre of his being that he must either do something extraordinary or perish, vanish, become dissolved in the excruciating bliss of this wonderful moment. Pushing Felich aside he planted himself in front of the crowd of officers and declaimed in a shrill voice like that of a girl:

How great is he Na-pole-on
In battle mighty, brave and strong.
But wavered he as soon as on
*Him turned his sword Bog-rati-on.**

They had all heard, but did not all remember these lines by Derzhavin, but they picked them up and sang them until they echoed and re-echoed across the green, and followed them up with cheers for Bagrattion, "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hur-rah!"

Somebody embraced Polchaninov. He was kissed, and he kissed in turn. He heard Felich, who was holding him tightly by the sleeve, say:

"Child!" You don't know what military glory is. . . Get your own head cracked or lop off someone else's for the honour of your country—that's glory! You, like me, were born for it! But tell me, what was Travin saying to you about me a while ago? Damme, he will answer to me for that! But to hell with him! I am as dry as a sponge. All I want is a drink!"

Gradually he tightened his grip on Polchaninov's arm

"Listen to me, my young friend," he continued. "If you take to drink you'll die. If you dont't—you'll die just the same. So the best thing to do is to drink!

He's not a Russian soldier who
With punch his strength refrains from matching.
He'll straggle when we are attacking,
And flunk when to an assault we go.

"Polchaninov, let's drink a toast to our friendship! Gentlemen, I invite you all to take a swill with me! I pay, gentlemen! Come on! Let's drink to friendship! Let's drink to Bagrattion!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The sun had been shining brightly in a cloudless sky from early morning on July 22 and the streets of Smolensk were teeming. Burghers in festive attire were gathered at the windows and on the balconies of the houses making them look like enormous flowerpots. The inhabitants had turned out in full force to witness the military parade held in celebration of the Empress Dowager's saint's day. The troops, marching into the city from opposite sides to the sound of fife and drum, looked splendid in their full dress uniforms, and their brightly polished accoutrements glittered in the sun. The Commanders-in-Chief accompanied by their gorgeous suites, rode towards each other on tall handsome steeds, Barclay, his face sombre, pale and calm, riding at a slow, sedate pace, his horse daintily picking its steps under his cold hand, while Bagrattion's horse pranced and curveted, performing all the tricks of the riding ring.

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* A play on the names of Napoleon and Bagrattion. "*Na pole on*" means "in the field is he." "*Bog rati on*" means "lord of hosts is he."

The inhabitants of Smolensk gazed wonderingly at the two Commanders-in-Chief and at the troops marching behind them. The First Army showed undoubted signs of weariness after its long and tiring retreat. In its crestfallen ranks even the Generals looked miserable and woebegone. Clearly, Barclay had been unable to dispel this depression and cheer his weary troops with the prospect of success. Bagrattion's troops presented an entirely different picture. Their faces shone with pride at the long and difficult march they had performed. "We have accomplished much and can accomplish much more," they seemed to say. It was as though the Second Army had not retreated from the Niemen to the Dnieper, but had uninterruptedly advanced, attacking and pursuing the enemy, and driving him from Russia. It was this contrast that caused the inhabitants' of Smolensk to gaze in wonder. . . .

The troops were lined up in the main streets, their uniforms sparkling with colour like blossoming trees in spring. The artillery pieces glinted in the sun, the drummers were beating a march, the regimental colours hung in heavy folds around their flagstaffs. Suddenly the bands struck up and a deafening cheer rang through the city. A stately rider in a General's uniform rode down the lines at an easy canter on an English chestnut horse, its saddle-cloth gleaming like gold. Numerous diamond Stars and Crosses glistened on the General's broad chest, and a tall white plume fluttered over the hat which surmounted his raven curls.

"Good day, friends!" he cried addressing the men. "You look as though you could beat the devil himself as easy as eating pie!"

"We'll do our best, little father!" came the thunderous response from the ranks.

"What a glorious picture! Can Boney beat us? Never in his life!"

These last words were uttered by a peasant in a short grey caftan and white trousers who was standing in the crowd by the side of a merchant's wife, a fat and dumpy woman, resembling a sack of flour.

"Beat us? Never!" responded another peasant, somewhat older than the first and dressed in a long homespun coat and black cotton trousers.

"Boney may have more men than us, but they can't compare with ours, that's flat!" chimed in a third villager, wearing a coachman's hat with a tassel behind. "It's the spirit that tells When Svatikov, Agei Zakharovich, came home on furlough last summer he said: 'The Russian soldier can beat any foreign soldier because he loves his country, and he's willing to sacrifice his life if Russia stands to gain by it!' Agei has been in the army for nigh on twenty years and he wouldn't tell a lie."

The three peasants, who had come into town the day before to get carting jobs, nodded their heads in agreement.

"'Shun! Colours! Pr-r-resent arms!"

The command went down the lines, repeated scores and perhaps a hundred times. The bayonets glinted as they rose and came to rest like lightning suddenly halted in its flight. The multi-coloured standards fluttered above the bayonets. The three peasants were standing at no great distance from where the white colours of the Smolensk Infantry Regiment—which had fought the French so valiantly at the Saltanovka earthwork two weeks previously—were swaying lazily from their tall flagstaff, held firmly in the grasp of an old, sickly looking soldier with a bandaged face.

"Why, that's Svatikov!" exclaimed the peasant in the white trousers in astonishment. "Talk of the devil, he's sure to appear! What do you think of that, eh?"

"Well, may I never move from this place if it isn't him! But good God, what's happened to his face?" exclaimed the peasant in the coachman's hat.

After the battle at Saltanovka, during which Private Svatikov had saved the regimental colours at the price of a broken jaw, he never let the flag out of his hand for a moment. He was not a sub-lieutenant and, therefore, it was not his duty to act as colour-bearer; but as a Chevalier of St. George and distinguished for his faithful service, he was appointed colour-bearer by special order of General Rayevsky. It was indeed him his astonished fellow villagers saw, his grey eyebrows drawn together, looking stern and straight before him.

* * *

The parade was over. The troops were standing easy. The Commanders-in-Chief had dismounted and surrounded by their suites, leisurely walked among the now uneven ranks of the soldiers. From the wooden sidewalks, from the courtyards and front gardens, grey-haired veterans and women with infants in their arms came surging towards Bagrattion, crying:

"Your Highness! Save Smolensk! Don't surrender it!"

And Bagrattion, raising his hand as if taking an oath, answered in a calm voice:

"I shall not surrender it, friends! Upon my word of honour I shall not!"

Delighted at the presence of their favourite, the soldiers pressed round their General. Olferyev tried to push them away, but soon gave it up.

"Alyosha!" said Bagrattion to him. "Call the sutlers! A bullet needs a sure eye, a bayonet a strong arm, and a soldier's stomach must not remain empty long!"

"Hurrah, little father!" came the loud response from the men.

In an instant a dozen or more sutlers with baskets and wheelbarrows loaded with a numerous variety of rolls, pies and cakes appeared as if by magic. From a large Russian leather purse, which Olferyev held open for him, Prince Peter Ivanovich drew a handful of silver rubles and scattering them among the sutlers beckoned the soldiers to the baskets and barrows.

"They're yours!" he said. "Eat, and much good may it do you, friends!"

The soldiers made a dash for the snacks.

"Hurrah! Good luck to you, little father!"

Barclay gazed at this scene with barely concealed annoyance. "Dolts!" he thought to himself. "They criticized him for his hauteur and stern aloofness! Let them! It was a pity, of course, that he lacked Bagrattion's ability to influence others by his personality, but, on the other hand, he could not be influenced by others. Soon, very soon, Bagrattion would be convinced of that. No, he could not play the mountebank, or squander his money! He was not rich, nor was Bagrattion, and poor people should husband their resources and not throw good money to the winds in order to acquire cheap notoriety. Did not he, Barclay, take care of his men? Were they not well-fed and well-clothed? But he did things differently from Bagrattion, and his own way was the best."

He pressed his lips tightly together and, limping slightly, made his way to the Ist Brigade of the mixed Grenadier Division. He had already reached the Carabineer Company of the nearest regiment when his ear caught the ironic words distinctly uttered by one of the soldiers:

"Here comes Blather and Folly hobbling up!"*

He was aware that this was his nickname among the troops, but he was not sure what to do about it, or whether he ought to do anything at all. And so, on passing the audacious soldier, he turned away so as not to see his face. Nevertheless, Carabineer Tregulyaev was deserving of attention. He was the most dashing, disciplined and distinguished soldier in his regiment. He was tall, muscular and agile His enormous moustaches and side whiskers were strongly tinged with grey, but his swarthy face and sparkling eyes always beamed with merriment as if he, Tregulyaev, wanted to say: "A soldier has nothing to lose: the past will never return, and God alone knows what the future holds in store!" When his regiment entered the city that morning this happy giant marched in front rattling a couple of wooden spoons, like castanets, ornamented with scraps of red and green cloth, the colours of the regimental uniform. He sang at the top of his voice and tripped and danced with such vivacity that one expected him to turn somersaults at any moment. There was probably not another soldier so full of fun as he in the entire First Army. The Commander-in-Chief passed on but Tregulyaev continued to indulge in his witticisms.

"He's like our old neat—neither bones nor meat."

This remark applied to a tall, lean, awkward new recruit, a Byelorussian. The men around him burst into a roar of laughter, but the recruit took no notice and did not even glance at the jester.

"Oh!" continued Tregulyaev teasingly. "Don't be downhearted brother Starynchuk! You are not the first man that went for beer and found himself a Grenadier. And what a Grenadier!"

Starynchuk mumbled something that the others did not catch.

"Now stop mooing like a cow! Cheer up! You look as if somebody has sold you a pup!" said Tregulyaev, heartily slapping the gloomy recruit on the shoulder.

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* A play on Barclay de Tolly. In the Russian text it is "*Boltai da i tolko*"—meaning: "Nothing but jabber."

"Sing us a song, Maximych!" one of the men requested.

"Sing? Why not, since we have the voice and the will?" responded Tregulyaev. Striking a pose and putting two fingers to his rather prominent Adam's apple, he began to sing, and the strains of a song came pouring from his throat as if released by a spring. His voice was strong, but of such a velvety tone that it simply gripped one's heart. The melody was simple, profoundly Russian, and the words rang out like the strokes of a silver bell, so pure and beautiful that the men of the entire company listened as if enchanted.

In the morning, at the break of day,
As the sun rose over the hill,
Two good friends met farewell to say
By a running, bubbling rill.
Just these two friends, farewell to say
Forever and a day. . . .

The Grenadiers listened with bated breath, some of them muttering to themselves: "Isn't that sweet, the devil take him!"

Fated each other ne'er more to see,
They journeyed o'er river and sea. . . .

Tregulyaev's voice suddenly broke off. The two Commanders-in-Chief with their brilliant suites were standing in front of the singer.

"Splendid, my heart!" exclaimed Bagrattion. "It's long since I've heard a soldier sing as well as that. Here, take this!"

With that he took a shining gold ten-ruble piece from Olferyev and handed it to the Grenadier. Tears sprang to Tregulyaev's eyes, which glistened more brightly than the golden coin.

"Thank you very much, Your Highness. It's more than I deserve!"

"Oh, my heart! This stuff never comes amiss in a soldier's purse or a Cossacks' pouch," answered Bagrattion.

Barclay turned his head away. He had spent so many years among Russian troops and few Russian Generals treated their men with the care and consideration that he treated the men under his command. There was abundant proof of this and the entire Army was aware of it. But there was one thing he did not appreciate: soldiers' songs. He did not prohibit the men from singing. Let them sing since it seemed they must. But he was never charmed by these songs; they touched no string in his heart.

"That's so, is it not, Mikhail Bogdanovich?" asked Bagrattion appealing to Barclay, but he did not wait for a reply. His keen glance rested on the Sergeant of the Carabineers' Company. Decorated with gold stripes and numerous medals, this old Goliath stood drawn to attention, one hand at the brim of his shako. His round face was as flushed as if he had just swilled a whole bottle of vodka, and his owl-like eyes glittered from under his bushy brows.

"Humph! Aren't you the man who saved your company from being captured by the French at Austerlitz? Your name is . . . now, let me think. . . ."

"Brezgun, Your Highness!" the Sergeant blurted out in a thundering voice, his round eyes rolling in their sockets.

"That's it! How do you do, old comrade?" replied Bagrattion, and turning to Barclay he said: "Mikhail Bogdanovich, let me introduce you to the bravest veteran in the Russian Army!"

Barclay curtly nodded. He too remembered this soldier. Brezgun had attacked Ochakov with Potemkin, had marched on Kagul with Rumyantsev, had captured Ismail with Suvorov, had fought at Trebbia and Novi, had marched across the Alps and had shed no little of his blood on Austrian and Prussian soil at Austerlitz and Preussisch-Eylau. Barclay remembered him, but made no sign to show it, nor did he utter a single word. What did words matter? He merely nodded again and slowly hobbled on. . . .

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Dusk had already fallen, but the bands were still playing and the strains of the songs the soldiers were singing in chorus still floated through the camp. The men had been issued a double ration of grog and so there was no end to their merriment. In Sergeant Brezgun's tent a light was burning. He himself was sitting on a log in the middle of the tent, surrounded by Tregulyaev's guests. Tregulyaev had arranged a treat with the gold ten-ruble piece he had received from the Prince. The feast was solemnly opened by Brezgun. He removed his tall shako from his bald head and extracted from it a small copper tea pot. He poured some water into the pot and placed it on the stove. Then, from the same shako, he extracted a glass, a small bag of sugar and another bag containing tea. He dropped a pinch of tea into the pot and when it had drawn he poured it into the glass, made the sign of the cross and began to sip the tea, slowly and contentedly, now and again puffing at his short wooden pipe and emitting bluish rings of smoke, just as if he were at home.

"It's better to be thrifty than rich," he observed with a smile, glancing with curiosity at the pies, calf's foot jelly, slices of beef and other viands procured from the canteen.

"Ivan Ivanovich, do me a favour!" interjected Tregulyaev. "Taste this white wine. I don't like to start without you!"

"That stuff's not for me, brother!" answered Brezgun. "I haven't touched it for years. Now punch is another matter. This is just like lady's tears!"

Nevertheless, it gave him great pleasure to see the guests with their sergeant's stripes on their sleeves, throwing their heads back, shutting their eyes and tossing glass after glass of vodka down their throats. It soon became evident that the "lady's tears" were no less potent than the best of the brew obtained in the canteen.

"Now, brother, take a glass, put some sugar in it, then a drop or two from the teapot, and then fill it to the brim with the white stuff and you will have my favourite punch," said Brezgun to Tregulyaev, good-naturedly teaching him how to concoct his favourite beverage.

Tregulyaev handed glass after glass to Ivan Ivanovich with every mark of respect for his rank and dignity. Nor did he forget to treat himself. His tongue became more loose as the moments passed.

"One day," he related, "a soldier landed in Hell. What was he to do? He looked round, and suddenly, an idea occurred to him He knocked some pegs into the wall, hung his accoutrements on them, lit his pipe, sat down and waited to see what would happen. Soon demons came creeping up to him from all sides, but he was not put out a bit. He just spat out and cried: 'Don't come near! Can't you see there's government property hanging here!'"

"Strike me pink!" exclaimed his auditors with admiration. "Government property, eh?"

"Yes, government property. The demons were scared at this, but they were dying to have a lark with the soldier. What could they do? One of them crept up to the drum and began to beat the 'March!' This was just what the soldier was waiting for. As soon as he heard the drum beat he put on his accoutrements and putting left foot first marched out of Hell as if he were on parade!"

"Well, I never! Ha-ha-ha! Cheated the Devil himself!" were the exclamations with which the guests greeted the end of the story.

Tregulyaev stuffed an enormous piece of onion pie into his mouth and after munching it, for a moment or two, said:

"What does a soldier need? He's like grass in the rain. Grows itself. He's at home everywhere. Lies down just where he is and falls asleep; wakes, gets up and shakes himself, and everything is as right as rain. That's how we live: sleeves rolled up to the elbows, work hard all day, eat what comes our way, drunk on water, shave with a mortar, and warm ourselves with smoke. Hard to get used to, but once you're used to it, you like it."

To Tregulyaev's aphorisms there was no end, and the more glasses of grog he tossed off the more his tongue was loosened until he reached the stage when it began to wag of its own accord.

"Once I tried to eat treacle with an awl," he said, "and it wasn't sweet at all!"

Neither one thing nor another,
And it wasn't worth the bother.

"Tell us the story of how you found yourself in the disciplinary squad," chimed in one of the guests.

Tregulyaev smoothed his side whiskers with an unsteady hand and swaying slightly answered:

"For the most trivial thing in the world. A muzhik knocked his head against something or other and a silver ruble was found on him."

"What did he knock his head against?"

"My fist, I think."

"Why did you hit him?"

"Why did he yell? I warned him and said: 'You give me that ruble and make no trouble, or it will be the worse for you!' But no! He wouldn't take my advice and so. . . ."

This story had been known a long time, although Tregulyaev related it very rarely, only under exceptional circumstances, such as the present. And it was because of this incident that he had not received his sergeant's stripes to this day.

"Old Blather and Folly was our Brigadier then," he continued, "and he ordered me to be sent to the disciplinary squad. On suspicion. . . ."

At this Brezgun's round eyes bulged with anger.

"Hey! Not in my presence! Where do you think you are with your 'Blather and Folly'? He's the Commander-in-Chief, appointed by the Tsar! If he's no Commander-in-Chief, I'm no Sergeant. And if I'm not a Sergeant, then the Tsar is no Tsar, and there's no God in heaven! You see where this sort of thing leads to! Didn't you see Prince Peter Ivanovich talking to me today? I am the first Sergeant in the Russian Army, and I'll not allow talk of this kind in my presence!"

The Sergeant bridled up like a cock and in his wrath he gripped the box on which the food was laid out with his great red hands.

"It's not for us to judge them," he continued. "We shall be judged by our grandchildren. There is no man without sin among us, and the time has come when every one of us can wash out his sins with his blood. For sacrifice and devotion our country will forgive. Do you understand me, lads?"

He turned heavily towards a dark corner of the tent where lanky Starynchuk squatted, gloomy and motionless, and gazed at him for several moments. Then he beckoned to him, saying:

"Come into the light, boy! Did you hear what I said? No need to feel disgraced any more. Treat him to something, Tregulyaev! Pain always seeks the doctor. Comradeship is the best medicine, it knocks Mr. Baronet Villiers* into a cocked hat. Oh laddie, laddie, never been to Saxony! You can't thresh rye by the fireside. If the French come at you and you can't do anything else—go for them tooth and nail. You'll wash out your sin that way. And when you've done that, Grenadier Starynchuk, you'll find everything in apple-pie order. You take my word for it."

Starynchuk listened to the Sergeant's admonition standing, with a glass in his trembling hand. Being so tall, he was obliged to stoop somewhat under the angle of the tent, but he did not notice this inconvenience. How little a man in trouble needs to make him happy! Starynchuk tossed the contents of the glass down his throat. His blood rushed to his face and a flush spread over his pale yellow cheeks. And with this hot blood, the kind words uttered by Brezgun entered his heart like an unexpected joy, promising light and warmth in the future. He grunted with satisfaction in the muzhiks' way, wiped his lips and bowed with a smile. All eyes were turned on him.

"Oh, Lou, we've only one like you!" sang out Tregulyaev. "You've got the face of a falcon and the mind of a snipe. Stop snivelling! When is a soldier sad? When he's got no bread. But you are well fed and in the company of friends, and true friends at that, like your own kith and kin, and what won't one do for a friend? Take care, though, you don't chum up with creepers and crawlers. Chum up only with those who'll tell you what's what! It's no use snivelling.

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* Villiers, a famous army surgeon of that day.

She sobs and sighs
And with her fair
tresses
She wipes her eyes.

What's the use of worrying? The whole business is not worth a quarter of an hour's thought!"

But while he was saying this Tregulyaev thought to himself: "His mother's milk hasn't dried on his lips yet. Fancy him being under the lash. Our Grenadiers lay it on thick, and if they give you a thrashing you never forget it." He handed Starynchuk a large slice of fresh pie. Like a Russian, he would tease and chaff one unmercifully, but his kindness always got the upper hand. He was wrong in assuming, however, that Starynchuk's case was "not worth a quarter of an hour's thought." His case was as follows.

In the spring of that year he was taken from the remote village in the Polessye Region where he was born and brought to the recruiting station in the nearest town. Here, amidst the fuss and bustle of enrolling recruits, he heard the cruel sentence that decided his fate:

"You'll make a splendid Grenadier!"

Before he could look round he found himself in a strange world. He ceased to be an individual human being and became part of an enormous thousand-headed body, bewhiskered, coarse, encased in iron and girded with leather. In other words, he was assigned to his regiment. This magic transformation took place in an instant, but it affected only the recruit's exterior; it did not affect his soul.

Towards the end of Lent Starynchuk was assigned to his company. He had plenty of time on his hands, as drill did not occupy all his thoughts and efforts. His heart and mind were neither in his regiment nor in his company—they remained at home, in his native village. What did he think about? Who knows? The sun moved across the heavens, the wind blew over the fields, but the long yellowish face of Starynchuk remained expressionless. His blue eyes seemed vacant and looked as if they were made of glass. Perhaps he did not see what he was looking at, neither the sun, nor the rye in the fields. Perhaps it was not even he who was sitting, gazing before him, but merely his huge body, tightly wrapped in his greatcoat, while he himself was somewhere far away. Sergeant Brezgun knew what that meant. The recruit was sick with longing for his home and dear ones. Men like that desert and make their way home by forest tracks and winding paths.

"He'll make a splendid Grenadier!" they had said at the recruiting office, and Brezgun had watched him closely to prevent him from deserting and to save him from the lash.

For days Starynchuk could not tear his eyes from the fields that spread far and wide under the warm spring sun. Beyond the fields lay a forest, and there, in the hollows of tall trees, were the hives of wild bees. You had only to open your mouth for the drops of sweet, amber honey to drop into it. Bees love quietness and plenty of space to fly in, and what place was quieter and more spacious than this? That is why the villages round about the forest were surrounded not only by orchards, but also with beehives. A rivulet wound its silvery course among the maple. ash and elm. How fine it would be to wander along the banks of that rivulet, emerge from the gloomy depths of the woods, see his clean, white-washed hut and then sit down by the side of black-browed Dona, his betrothed!

Keen and experienced though Brezgun was, Starynchuk nevertheless gave him the slip. One day, in Passion Week, he disappeared from the regiment.

Another man in his place would probably have reached home. To do that, however, he would have had to hide behind bushes, lie flat and invisible in the grass, or crouch behind fallen trees. But Starynchuk was unable to do that. He was too big and bulky to be able, when necessary, to climb a tree like a squirrel, or wriggle like a snake in the grass. For a long time he wandered hungry and timid, making wide detours of the villages and avoiding people on the way. In the summer he was caught and brought back to the regiment.

The commander sentenced the deserter to run the gauntlet; two hundred strokes with ramrods were to slash his back to the bone. But it so happened that on the day the sentence was to have been carried out the Army received its marching orders. The punishment was postponed, and had been pending to this day. Meanwhile Starynchuk underwent another wonderful transformation: this time not only in his exterior. It seemed as though some hand had wiped out his longing for his native village, his cottage, his father and mother and his black-browed Dona and had substituted for it raging anger and bitter hatred towards those who had robbed him of his dear ones—the French. And this feeling mingled with the bitter recollection of his belated punishment, disgrace and pain which still hung over him. He would not desert now. With his regiment he would stand fast to the last to save his father's house from alien occupation, and save Dona from outrage by a foreign foe!

Starynchuk did, indeed, become a splendid Grenadier, and although he himself did not realize what had happened to him, and still less could he describe it, keen-eyed and experienced Brezgun understood him. It was not in jest that he claimed that Starynchuk was the most reliable soldier in his company. Nor was he mistaken. What had brought this ex-deserter out of his customary state of despondency and silent reverie? The wine he had drunk? The Sergeant's admonition? Tregulyaev's chaff? Or all of these together? It is hard to say. But suddenly he straightened up and taking a step forward, said:

"If the Sergeant gives me another tot of grog I will say thank you!"

He wanted to add: "If those Frenchies fall into my hands, they'll wish they were never born!" He was so agitated, however, that the words stuck in his throat, but he brought his enormous fist down on the improvised table with such force that the whole tent shook, and the light went out.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

At first Polchaninov read in a trembling and halting voice, but soon it rang out, firm and clear:

"My little grey mare cost me only a hundred rubles, but she is extremely wiry and clever. I have no time to see that she is well fed, so what do I do? I just get off her back and let her roam at her own free will. She then either nibbles the grass, or makes for a hay barn, or else attaches herself to the cavalry, where the soldiers, with their usual love of animals, give her a portion of oats. But with all this, she never loses sight of me, and at the slightest attempt on anybody's part to lead her away she begins to neigh and kick as if warning me of danger. The moment I call her she stops eating, gallops towards me and stands stock still like a post. When I jump from the saddle and pass through a wicket, or enter a hut, she lies down at the entrance like a faithful dog, and does it so very carefully, so as not to crush the saddle, or let the stirrup get under her side. The moment I come out she jumps to her feet and shakes herself. The tirelessness of my little mare is known throughout the Division, and even at General Headquarters. The Grenadiers recognize me at a distance by my horse, and as soon as they catch sight of me their faces light up because they know that when they meet me the bivouac is not far off. Today, Sister—that is what I call my little mare—provided me with several moments of inexpressible happiness. I was galloping through the camp with a message from the Divisional Commander when I almost collided with Prince Bagrattion. It almost took my breath away to see my wonderful hero. I don't know how I saluted him, but I distinctly remember the greeting he gave me. The Prince stopped and beckoned me to approach him. I obeyed, scarcely conscious of what I was doing.

"'Your mount is no beauty, but it's a very good horse all the same,' he said, smiling in that kind way in which only he can smile.

"'Yes, Sir!'—I answered, saying the first thing that came to my mind—'Yes, Your Excellency!'

"'I see you on it day and night, my heart! I recognize you by it'—said the Prince.

"Good God! Bagrattion notices and recognizes me! How did I deserve such happiness?"

Polchaninov stopped reading and passed his hand awkwardly up and down the pages of the diary in which he had made the above entry. Colonel Prince Grigory Matveyevich Kantakuzen, commander of the Grenadier Brigade, quickly rose from the table—which was temptingly laden with bowls of cool, crimson, beet-root soup, plates of tender suckling pig in cream, and ruddy meat pies—and heartily embraced Polchaninov. This was not the first time the latter had read extracts from his diary to the Colonel and had often moved the sentimental old soldier to tears, which had a habit of appearing suddenly in his coal-black eyes. On such occasions he would almost suffocate Polchaninov in his embrace: but such scenes usually took place when the two were alone. Today, however, there were in the Colonel's tent, besides himself and Polchaninov, numerous guests whom the Prince had invited to supper. And what guests! There was General Yermolov, with his tunic unbuttoned, revealing a spencer, under which he wore a silk-embroidered Russian shirt. How handsome this giant would look if he threw off his tunic and spencer and remained only in his Russian attire! And there was Count Kutaissov, young and handsome, with features of the type that can be met with only in the portraits of Van Dyck, with a mane of wavy black hair crowning his white and open forehead. And there was the chief guest of the evening, Kantakuzen's old friend and patron—Bagrattion. Why did Prince Grigory Matveyevich arrange this supper and invite Polchaninov to read his diary to his guests?

At a small table posted near the entrance of the tent feasted the adjutants. Polchaninov knew some of them by sight and knew their names, but was not acquainted with any of them. The poor infantry lieutenant was no company for these brilliant Guards, among whom were Bagrattion's favourite adjutant Olferyev, and Cornet of the Horse Guards Prince Golitsin, that impudent, reckless gambler and rake, never, it was said, out of debt and bearing the nickname of "Prince Makarelli." There were other officers present too, but all to a man were aristocratic and rich. Polchaninov would not even dare to address them, but they were gazing at him with envy. Why? Was it not strange? Colonel Kantakuzen stroked his enormous, raven-black side whiskers *à la* Broussebart and embraced Polchaninov once again.

"What do you think of him, Your Highness?" he enquired of Bagrattion in ecstasy. "He'll be a Russian Homer in time, don't you think?"

There was probably no kinder and simpler-hearted man in the entire Russian Army than Prince Grigory Matveyevich. His face, while still retaining the sharp and noble outlines of the southerner, was beginning to show signs of obesity and always bore a welcome smile. He was one of those jolly officers who could simultaneously play a hand at cards on an upturned drum with a subaltern and dictate orders for his brigade to an adjutant. No wonder his subordinates loved him, and it was not he so much as they who were proud of the fact that he was a direct descendant of Byzantine Emperors and Moldavian Kings.

"Thank you, my dear boy!" Kantakuzen said to Polchaninov. "Thank you! It gave me great pleasure to hear you. And it is an honour to have such a rare scholar in my division."

"I am no scholar myself," interjected Bagrattion. "For me, writing is as hard as dancing in shackles. But I love scholars. The past is ours, but the future is destined for them. And I rejoice for Russia when I find such. We have had enough of foreign scholars, especially Germans. We must have our own. However much you feed a German, and however much you transplant him, like a cabbage, he always looks to Berlin."

"Oh, those Teutons!" chimed in Yermolov smiling. "I was in the bathhouse with one of them. The attendant was fanning this Teuton with some birch twigs, but he kept on yelling that he felt no coolness from the Russian fans. Once, in a certain town, in mid-winter, some dogs attacked this German. He wanted to pick up a stone to drive them away, but the stone was frozen to the ground. 'What an accursed country!' he yelled. 'Stones are fastened to the ground, but dogs are allowed to run free!' Verily, what is meat for the Russian is poison for the German!"

"They have no love either for Russia or the Russians!" remarked Bagrattion feelingly. "They are of no use to us, either as tutors or as scullions. If a nation has no leaders of its own it can have no history. The nation's glory is submerged in the depths of oblivion. Its spirit dies from ennui, and all desire to emulate one's great fellow countrymen fades away. A nation can have no history if it has no leaders. But to have such, we must learn. That is why I love scholars."

He looked round with his flashing eyes and continued:

"Who are my adjutants? Whom have I by my side? Muratov—God rest his soul!—wrote quite decent Russian verse. Olferyev—I am talking about you, Alyosha!—wields the pen as well as he does the sword! And all are Russians!"

"For the people and the army to love a foreigner," interjected Kutaissov warmly, "that foreigner must at least be distinguished for his actions. The people worship boldness, daring and success, and I, too, bow the knee before their altar!"

Yermolov, taking Kutaissov by the arm, said:

"Do you know, Count, when you begin to talk politics I look at you and want to shout: 'How handsome you are, my dear friend! What eyes! What a nose!'"

Bagrattion burst out laughing, but Kutaissov, in his simplicity and ardour, did not realize that Yermolov was chaffing him. Polchaninov thought to himself: "Yermolov! What an amazing mixture you are of kindness and craft! How irresistibly attractive and yet dangerous you are!" Yermolov puckered his broad brow and said in a thoughtful and earnest tone:

"Boldness and daring are all very fine. We had Suvorov; we now have Prince Bagrattion. But, Count, we must not forget that the Scythians defeated Darius, and the Parthians defeated the Romans, by retreating."

Bagrattion turned round abruptly on the carpet-covered ammunition case on which he was sitting, and answered:

"Whom are you trying to convince, namesake? He who is opposed to retreating under all circumstances is a fool. In eighteen hundred and six Kutuzov saved us by retreating. But a commander who retreats for retreating's sake is not worth a brass farthing. And that is what we are discussing!"

"The commander of our Grenadier Division is just like that," interjected Kantakuzen. "In battle, Prince Karl* is beyond reproach, but before a battle he is ready to flee to the end of the earth. We shall have plenty of trouble with him yet!"

"Don't let that surprise you," responded Bagrattion with animation. "All Germans are alike. That is why Suvorov hated them! As for your Prince. . . ."

Polchaninov surmised that they had forgotten about him and that explained why the conversation was becoming so extraordinarily candid.

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* Prince Karl of Mecklenburg, a relative of the Russian Emperor.

He rose, picked up his diary and bowed, but as he was about to leave the tent he was pulled up by the voice of Bagrattion:

"Hey, my heart, stop! Wait!"

Bagrattion rose, approached Polchaninov and kindly placing his hand on his humble epaulet with its lone star and regimental number, he said:

"The conversation started about you and ought to be resumed. Remember my words. If you become a Colonel, that will be splendid. If you become a General, that will be still more splendid. But if you allow yourself to be made a German, you will be lost to Russia. And then you will lose my friendship. Do you understand me? Go, and God be with you, my heart."

* * *

"Sergeant Brezgun! The Brigade Commander wishes to see you!" Not the regimental but the Brigade Commander! This sudden call interrupted Ivan Ivanovich's presiding functions at Tregulyaev's feast. Carefully straightening his tunic and fastening his accoutrement strap as tightly as it would go across his mighty chest, Brezgun hastily crossed the threshold of Colonel Kantakuzen's tent. Thanks to the numerous candles that were burning the tent shone pink like a Chinese lantern, but Brezgun never expected to find such an assembly of Generals gathered beneath this stout canvas. The Sergeant's heart palpitated like that of a piglet in a sack. The fumes of the beverages he had imbibed emerged in a cold sweat on his thick neck. His raspberry-coloured face became livid as if he was about to have a stroke, which the old veteran had had once or twice before. The Brigade Commander's side whiskers hovered right in front of the Sergeant's nose, but for some reason his voice reached him as if from a distance. He was saying to Bagrattion:

"We shall know in a moment, Your Highness, what sort of a soldier he is. How d'you do. Brezgun?"

"Quite well, thanks, Your Highness!" roared Brezgun in response.

"Don't yell like that, you monster! I'm not deaf! Oh! What's this? You've been guzzling again, you rascal! Is that right?"

"Only a tot or two, Your Highness!"

"We'll see! Who's this deserter you have in your company?"

"Recruit Starynchuk, Your Highness!"

"Recruit? So this is his first offence?"

"Yes, Sir!"

"And has not been punished yet?"

"No. Sir!"

"What's he like? What sort of soldier is he likely to make?"

"One of the best, Your Highness. A Grenadier!"

"Bear in mind, you're tipsy. Are you telling the truth?"

Brezgun's owl-like eyes blinked rapidly. His mouth became contorted and a faint rattle came from his chest.

"Brezgun cannot lie!" said Bagrattion smiling. "Drunk or sober, it's easier for him to die than to tell a lie. Don't offend the old veteran, Prince Grigory Matveyevich, I know him very well."

The Colonel licked his red moist lips and gave the Sergeant a resounding kiss on his fat cheek.

"We cannot offend each other, can we, Brezgun?" he said.

"No, Sir, that we cannot!" roared the Sergeant joyfully. "And if we do, we wipe the offence out at once. Thank you very kindly, Your Highness!"

"And so," continued the Colonel, "the Divisionl Commander considers that we acted irregularly in postponing the punishment of Grenadier Starynchuk when the order to march was received. According to the regulations the Prince is right and I am wrong: but I have a notion that there is such a thing as humanity as well as regulations. . . ."

"And reason," added Yermolov.

"Precisely, Your Excellency. And these prohibit me from flogging the soldier at a time when the fate of our country depends upon the stout, strong backs of the long-suffering soldiers."

"And on the ardour of the soldiers' hearts," exclaimed Kutaissov.

"Precisely, Your Highness. Prince Karl, however, wants me to ignore all this. I confess, my position is embarrassing."

Kantakuzen was indeed extremely agitated. Standing in the middle of the tent and gesticulating vigorously in his excitement, he enquired of Bagrattion:

"What do you order me to do, Your Highness?"

Prince Peter Ivanovich did not answer at once. The case in itself was as simple as could be, but not so from the standpoint of "policy." The Divisional Commander was a German Prince and a relative of the Russian Emperor, and was interested in the case.

"I cannot give you any orders," he said at last. "You are not under my command, Grigory Matveyevich. But I will not conceal from you what I would do. . . ."

He paused, thoughtfully extended his wineglass to Yermolov, Kutaissov and the host, slowly clinked glasses with them, and still more slowly sipped the wine. Suddenly, with a quick gesture, he placed the glass on the table, ruffled his hair and taking Yermolov by the lapel of his coat said:

"Dear namesake! You are Pater Gruber. You can read men's hearts. I ask you, am I right? I would not have this recruit flogged. This is not the time for that sort of thing. But I would not absolve him of his guilt. What do you want him to be? A good soldier. But men do not become good soldiers out of fear. I would decide this way: postpone the punishment again and inform the culprit that it will be annulled if he conducts himself like a true soldier."

"In the very first battle," added Yermolov, "Bravo, Your Highness!"

"Let him win the Cross of St. George and the punishment will be annulled!" exclaimed Kutaissov.

"That's what I think, gentlemen. We don't flog Chevaliers."

"Except in those cases when we do," observed Yermolov ironically.

Silence reigned round the table for a moment or so until it was interrupted by Bagrattion, who said:

"If I were you, Prince Grigory Matveyevich, I would announce this decision in an order to the Brigade, so that all your subordinates might see what a reasonable and far-sighted commander they have."

"Thank you very much, Your Highness," answered Kantakuzen. "That is exactly what I shall do. In fact, I shall issue the order at once. But there is one thing. . . ."

"Are you afraid of the Prince?" enquired Yermolov.

"You have guessed right, Alexei Petrovich," answered Kantakuzen. "A little. . . . He is as meticulous as a clockmaker and as heartless as a doll."

"You should not fear him," answered Yermolov, a note of sternness suddenly entering his voice. "The Germans lord it over us because we fear them instead of twisting them into a ram's horn." Suddenly remembering that Sergeant Brezgun was present, he turned to him and bawled: "Get out of here!" "Quick march!" Then, addressing Kantakuzen he said: "You, Prince, report to Prince Karl that you have issued an order of this kind on our advice. That's point one. And point two: I will put your Prince in his place tomorrow through Mikhail Bogdanovich. I shall do that, take my word for it!"

"But isn't Barclay made of the same dough?" enquired Bagrattion.

"Yes, but the leaven is different, Your Highness!" answered Yermolov, and rising, he seemed to fill the tent with his great body.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

From the moment the Armies entered Smolensk the city underwent a change. Its streets, formerly so quiet and sleepy, were now thronged with excited crowds from morning to night, carriages and carts drove in all directions in an endless train. The city stores and market-places were heaped with goods, the terrified merchants selling out at a loss. At the crossroads crowds were gathered around booths and stalls consuming vodka and a vast variety of viands. The shop of Savva Yemelyanov the famous pastry cook, was so packed that one needed considerable strength to elbow one's way into it. It was the same at the old tavern that bore the sign of "The Danzig Eating House," where the fortunate ones who were able to gain admission were eating and drinking, and playing banker and faro. Coffee-pots were bubbling on the stove, and jugs of cream were ranged temptingly on shelves. Army officers were sitting at the counter, or at tables, smoking their long cherry-wood pipes. Tobacco pouches were never closed and wine sparkled in translucent goblets. The host of the "Danzig" wandered from table to table asking his guests: "What's going to happen? Where shall I go if the French gain the upper hand? Do me a favour, gentlemen, recommend me to your friends, so that I can get rid of at least part of my stock." And he opened bottle after bottle of Rhine wine, pouring the golden liquor into the cut-glass goblets with his own hand.

"I could never tolerate rats, metaphysics or Bonaparte," grumbled

Felich, "but still less can I tolerate mad dogs and Russian shopkeepers. Go away, you skinflint!"

The tavern keeper skipped behind his counter like a rabbit; the Cavalry Captain yawned and puffed at his bright-red Turkish clay pipe with its large amber mouthpiece. He felt out of sorts today. He looked with revulsion at the heaps of pink-cheeked peaches, fragrant pears and grapes piled in porcelain bowls in front of him. But a foraging commissioner in a black tunic without epaulets,* a dashing Lieutenant of the Kazan Dragoon Regiment in a dark green coat with scarlet collar, cuffs and facings, and a Cornet of Uhlans with an exceptionally colourless face and bulging eyes, did full honour to the treat he was giving them Where did he get the money with which to provide his friends and casual acquaintances with such sumptuous feasts every night? Everybody knew that he had not a penny to his name. The sources of his income could not but be dubious, but it did not occur to anybody to ask him. The luxury of his table and the generosity with which he threw his money right and left eclipsed all doubts.

For three days and nights Polchaninov had whirled in Felich's orbit, caught in a vortex of continuous carousing, unable to pull himself together. He vaguely remembered Travin's warning. There was something suspicious in the way Felich was always ready to pay for his own and others' pleasures, and even the kind consideration paid to him by his dangerous friend caused Polchaninov moments of painful reflection. He was haunted by the fear that sooner or later Felich would compel him to pay for his cordiality and lavishness a hundred times over. Was the Baron really dishonest? Could a Russian officer be dishonest? Such were the questions that tormented the young lieutenant. A passionate desire to find an answer to them drew him to the Cavalry Captain and held him as in a vice.

Felich was bored. His brows were drawn in gloomy reflection. Suddenly he hurled his clay pipe to the floor and his dull eyes sparkled.

"Hey! Bring me champagne! And cards! I'll open a bank of five hundred rubles! I'm dealing, gentlemen! Who will take a hand? Mr. Commissioner, won't you? You have plenty of money, I lay a wager. Come on now, play up!"

The cards flashed. Heaps of Dutch guldens passed swiftly across the table and rose higher and higher, tempting the punters. Again and again the Lieutenant of Dragoons drew his fat wallet from his inside pocket, took some money from it, put it back, only to withdraw it again a moment later.

"Here, you coach and lanterns!" shouted Felich to the Cornet of Uhlans, whose eyes were becoming more glassy every minute. "Keep 'em straight! Bank? Certainly. Beaten. Pay up, Mr. Coachman! What about you, Polchaninov?"

"I have no money," answered the Lieutenant in a low voice.

"What? Nonsense! Here, take mine. Come on, bet."

"I can't. . . ."

"Ah, is that so? I suppose you're right. But every officer has a horse for such contingencies. You, surely, have one. What?"

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* Foraging officers were deprived of their epaulets by order of Alexander I shortly before the war of 1812 because of their thieving propensities.

"Yes, I have," answered Polchaninov almost in a whisper.

A desperate idea flashed through his mind: "I'll try . . . and the mystery will be solved at one stroke!"

"Play," Felich urged him. "I guarantee you will go away with your pockets full. What's the value of the horse?"

"A hundred rubles."

"One hundred rubles! Draw a card!"

Polchaninov drew a card, while Felich held another at arm's length for several moments and gazed intently at the Lieutenant as if he were seeing him for the first or for the last time. Then he laughed and dropped his hand.

"Turn it up! Beaten! Hard luck, old boy! Fortune is against you. Now you have no horse. Bring it to me tomorrow at dinner time. What?"

And he laughed insolently, gloating over the deathly pallor of his beaten partner. Felich enjoyed extraordinary luck. The foraging commissioner, puffing and blowing, took out his fourth thousand ruble note. The "coach and lanterns" had long been patting his pocket in which his last silver rubles lay. The Dragoon officer now kept his sadly depleted purse in his hand all the time. Polchaninov rose from the table, his face contorted by an embarrassed smile. His eyes blinked suspiciously, but he still clung to the hope that this was no more than a joke on Felich's part, and that he would not really have to part with Sister. Pulling himself together with an effort he said:

"And so, tomorrow. . . ."

Felich glanced at him coldly, and the icy words he uttered dispelled Polchaninov's last hope.

"Yes, without fail! Otherwise . . . as a gentleman, you know what the consequences will be. Here, coach and lanterns, your money is all gone. Get out and don't hinder the Commissioner and the Lieutenant from finishing their game."

Polchaninov turned and made for the door. Sister's humped nose, her wise and devoted eyes, her ungainly figure, which however, had become so near and dear to him, hovered vividly before his eyes. It seemed to him that he had only to stretch forth his hand to stroke her shaggy sides. But instead of that he raised both his hands and buried his face in them. Sister! Even Bagrattion had praised her. What about those pages in his diary? The horror of what had happened suddenly struck him like a flash. He groaned and, driven by gusts of soundless sobs, gritting his teeth until his temples ached, he ran down the tavern steps. At the bottom step Travin clutched him by the arm.

"So Felich fleeced you after all, eh? The cad!"

* * *

Dim lights were glimmering in the houses, the sentries called to each other, and the town clocks were already striking a late hour of night when Olferyev, having been relieved from duty and having changed his clothes, stood on the doorstep of his lodgings drawing on his fashionable pistachiocoloured gloves—graceful, supple, and serenely handsome. His old manservant, who accompanied him in the campaign and also acted as his treasurer, shook his head as he handed him his pocket money.

"Here are five hundred rubles, Alyoshenka," he said. "Don't ask for any more. I suppose you are going to the tavern again? What a pity! It seems to draw you like Capernaum. Whatever do you do there? Play cards, I suppose. You are lucky you never win. . . ." "Thank God we are not poor," he added, spitting three times to avoid the evil eye, "and we don't depend upon your winnings. But just think, Alyoshenka. Supposing you won all the money from some poor infantry lieutenant who has barely a rag to his back and pay amounting to twenty-five rubles in assignats a month, and not a copeck of his own over that! There are lots like that. Wouldn't your conscience prick you, Alyoshenka?"

With that he closed the chest, turned the key, which he guarded himself, and sighed. Olferyev was quite accustomed to these admonitions and knew beforehand what his old and faithful servant had to say.

"Be quiet, Nikanor," he said with a smile. "Why do you think I'm going to play cards again? Perhaps I'm not going to the tavern at all. There is a theatre in Smolensk. I can imagine what a miserable and wretched affair it must be compared with St. Petersburg. It is worth a visit if only for that."

In saying this Olferyev was deceiving his old servant and also himself. He passed into the street. His snow-white Horse Guard's uniform gleamed in the darkness and his sword and spurs rattled and jingled as he walked straight to the hotel and restaurant run by the Italian Ciappo, where at night were gathered all the brilliant youth of the Guards. Ciappo's was far more fashionable than the "Danzig," but its spacious hall with its moulded ceiling and alabaster statues posted in the corners, was no less uproarious and filled with thick blue tobacco smoke. At the entrance to the hall Olferyev met his fellow officer of the Horse Guards, Golitsin, nicknamed "Prince Makarelli." He was Prince Bagrattion's cousin, but being much his junior in years, he regarded his celebrated relative as his uncle. "Prince Makarelli" held a liquor glass high in his hand, filled to the brim with thick, sparkling "leroi."

On catching sight of Olferyev he exclaimed: "Alyosha! I'm so glad you've come! Just imagine! I had already taken the bank and had dealt the cards when Klingfer and Davidov suddenly went for each other. What a shindy! The cards went flying over the floor. I tell you, it was a regular Tatar massacre! *Et vous, mon cher, comment trouvez-vous ces aliénés-là?*"*

"What! Are they at loggerheads again?" asked Olferyev in amazement. "*Qui n'entend qu'une cloche, n'entend qu'un son. Il faudra voir à quoi nous en tenir.*"**

A dark Lieutenant-Colonel, wearing the uniform of the Akhtyrka Hussars, with the most comical snub nose and silver-streaked, curly hair, jumped up from the table and exclaimed:

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* What do you think of these lunatics?

** To be able to judge one must hear both sides. Let's see what it's all about.

"Alyosha! Where wine flows words flow! Sit down, eat and drink, and judge these crazy ones."

Two officers seated at the table rose and solemnly saluted Olferyev. One was a tall, dashing captain of the Horse Guards named von Klingfer. The other, an officer of the Cuirassiers, short of stature and with the gestures of an ape, was Count Leiming. Both were General Barclay's aides-de-camp.

"Davidov was telling me about his acquaintance with Suvorov," said Klingfer, politely withdrawing his long pipe from his mouth. "He intends to write a book about it so that the story might not be lost to posterity. But in my opinion posterity will be interested to learn about great men only that which is really great about them."

"In our lodge of the 'Military Brothers'. . . ." chimed in "Prince Makarelli," assuming a mysterious air. . . .

"Nonsense!" interrupted Leiming with the lofty scorn of a courtier. "Not a single great man belongs to a Masonic Order, unless, perhaps, His Highness, the Cesarevitch Constantine. He is the only one."

"What makes you think, Count, that His Highness is a great man?" asked Olferyev laughing. "High birth is no criterion. . . . It is greatness of spirit and action."

"The devil!" exclaimed Davidov. "Let me finish what I have to say!"

This Hussar spoke with great animation, and ardent sincerity seemed to radiate from every fibre of his restless being. Thrusting back his gold embroidered pelisse and ruffling his hair, he continued his interrupted story.

"I was nine years old, and as frisky as a lamb. At that time my father was in command of the Mounted Chasseurs Regiment at Poltava. There, at a parade, I saw Suvorov. The old man knew and loved my father; and he took a liking to me for my forwardness. 'Deniska! Come here!' he said, beckoning to me. And this great hero stroked my bristling hair with his small dry hand, as yellow as wax. 'By God! What a fine lad,' he said. 'He will be a soldier and win three battles before I die.' I danced and jumped for joy. I at once threw away my psalter, drew my sword and nearly gouged out the eyes of my tutor, tore a hole in my nurse's cap and cut off the tail of our wolf-hound."

"I suppose these were the three victories that Suvorov had predicted," remarked Leiming sarcastically.

"And the benign hand of your father led you back to the psalter," added Klingfer.

"And now that I have made much progress, if not in stature, at least in my Russian way of thinking," continued Davidov, suddenly assuming a grave air, "in our present straitened circumstances, I bitterly regret that Suvorov is not with us."

"But Denis!" interrupted Olferyev. "We have Bagrattion!"

Klingfer's jaw dropped and his rosy face suddenly became astonishingly like the roughly-hewn faces of knights carved on tombstones to be found in ancient German cathedrals.

"And not only Bagrattion," he said, slowly and deliberately. "Happily, prudence and caution also command the Russian Army. They are its best captains."

At a first glance von Klingfer seemed to be as young, jolly and dashing an officer as many of those in his circle, but now and again his youthful brightness seemed to be overcast by stern restraint, by a sort of grim introspection.

"You are speaking of General Barclay, of course," answered Olferyev in a tone of vexation. "I do not question his merits. But prudence and caution, which are his chief merits, have imperceptibly brought the Russian Army to Smolensk."

"In less than six weeks of war!" interjected Davidov indignantly.

"In our Lodge. . . ." began "Prince Makarelli," but realizing that he was on the wrong tack, he changed the subject and said: "I wonder where Bonaparte will have driven us in another month from now."

The dispute flared up like a burning hayrick. The officers' voices grew louder every moment and their arguments more acrimonious.

"The honour of our arms is untarnished to this day," shouted Davidov. "Nobody can deny that! Napoleon has never met a foe like us before. But, gentlemen, it's enough to break one's heart to think what territory we have already yielded!"

"With God's help we shall retreat still further," retorted Klingfer.

The crusty logic of Barclay's aide-de-camp exasperated Olferyev. "It is a school, an entire school," he thought to himself bitterly. "Miserable peripatetics!"* The "leroi" had got to the Cornet's head and he felt as if it were on fire. He spoke sharply, as sharply as he possibly could, deliberately trying to provoke Klingfer into a rage.

"You trust in God," he retorted, "but we, in addition, trust in Prince Bagrattion. Why should we conceal it? We detest this retreating. We are weary of it. It is shameful!"

Olferyev's head became more fuddled than ever. Fragmentary thoughts chased each other through his mind. "Unhappy Russia! Muratov is the luckiest of us all! A host of misfortunes—one way out!" Suddenly springing to his feet, he raised his hand and, swaying unsteadily, he began to sing in a rich, tenor voice, which rang through the hall:

Vive l'état militaire
Qui promet à nos souhaits
Les retraites en temps de guerre,
Les parades en temps de paix....

This ditty, which Muratov had composed, was often sung by the Guards officers of the Second Army. And now, first "Prince Makarelli" and then Davidov took it up, followed by a dozen other voices, strong and weak, discordant and harmonious, until somebody's powerful voice led them in the rollicking chorus:

The honour of our uniform
We faithfully must guard.

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* *I. e.*, pupils of the school of Aristotle.

7*

Parade and drill in time of peace,
Retreat in time of war. . . .

Klingfer stood with pale face, his arms crossed over his chest, biting his lips with vexation.

"Bravo! Splendid!" a voice thundered behind his back.

He looked round. It was Felich.

"Stop your *coups de théâtre*,* Baron!" he said. "And I advise you not to approach people from behind."

Felich laughed, twitched his moustache like a cockroach and said in a sneering tone:

"The bad habit of thinking aloud affords me a little pleasure now and again, but it often gets me into trouble. Happily, I am not ambitious and do not hang around General Headquarters."

"Felich!!!" the warning exclamation came simultaneously from the three staff officers—Klingfer, Olferyev and Leiming—as if by word of command.

The Hussar clicked his spurs.

"I meant no offence, gentlemen!" he answered.

The ape-like Cuirassier and his tall comrade gravely consulted together in whispers for several seconds and then Klingfer approached Olferyev.

"Look here, Cornet!" he said. "Count Leiming and I are General Barclay's aides-de-camp. The song which you are so fond of singing is very fine and witty, but it is offensive to the person under whom we serve. Moreover, certain gentlemen at Headquarters of the Second Army are circulating a certain silly letter. . . ."

"Here it is!" intervened Felich, gleefully reaching for his pouch.

Olferyev looked at Klingter, but scarcely saw him. He could not believe that the vicious and repulsive mask that hovered before his eyes belonged to that calm and handsome officer. Strangely enough, at the first words Klingter uttered Olferyev's intoxication vanished. His anger and indignation proved more potent than the "leroi": nevertheless, he was still under the influence of its fumes, and his temples were throbbing like a thousand hammers. He was choking with rage, and to relieve his feelings he tore his gloves to pieces.

"Are you insinuating, Captain, that I am circulating a certain letter, and that I am doing so on my General's instructions?" he enquired of Klingfer.

"Bravo," roared Felich. "Splendid! Oh, I would not stand anything like that!" he added provocatively.

According to Klingfer's precise calculations the moment had arrived for this quarrel to draw to its natural and inevitable conclusion. It was useless dragging it out any longer, and, moreover, it was contrary to good form to do so. He therefore said firmly and emphatically:

"I scarcely think the latter is the case. As for the former—yes. You are circulating the letter—you, you, you!"

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* Theatrical tricks.

Again Felich intervened:

"Bravo! I would not tolerate anything like that! Gentlemen, I'm at your service!" An onlooker might have thought that Felich was the principal character in this scene.

Olferyev stepped forward and flinging a piece of his torn glove into Klingfer's face, said:

"Take that, you liar!"

The Horse Guards officer staggered as if he had been struck not by a piece of kid leather, but by a stone, or a knuckle-duster. His hand grasped the hilt of his sword, but Leiming restrained him.

"*Kreutzschockdonnerwetter! Sie sind ein famoser Schwerenöther,*" * he hissed between his teeth. "Tomorrow I will shoot you Cornet, Count Leiming will be my second."

"Colonel Davidov will arrange with you, Count, the details of the duel," said Olferyev, turning his back on his opponent and putting on his cap. "Good night, gentlemen!"

The seconds shook hands. Silence reigned in the hall. The ring of curious spectators which had formed around the disputants opened to allow Olferyev to pass, but before he got to the door an artillery officer in a threadbare tunic and a cotton sash hastened into the hall. It was Travin.

"Gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "I testify on my honour that the letter which is the cause of this quarrel is being circulated by none other than Alexander Rayevsky. Ensign of the 5th Chasseur Regiment. All the copies are the work of his hand, which I hope, he himself will not deny if asked."

Davidov whispered something to Leiming. The latter said:

"We seconds, consider that the Lieutenant's explanation is sufficient to remove the cause which gave rise to this quarrel. With good will. . . ."

Felich roared out in protest: "Denis, how can you! Blood must be spilt after all that has been said and done! Blood!"

"Shut up, Felich!" cried Davidov stamping his foot. "Shut up, or I'll. . . . You keep out of this!"

Travin went up to the Baron and shaking his forefinger in front of his nose said:

"We know what to do and what not to do without your advice, Bedouin. But if I were in your place I would be extremely offended with the Lieutenant-Colonel. Why, just now, he roared at you as if you were his batman!"

"Humph! What's that got to do with you?"

"I should take offence, I say!"

"Well, take offence if you like, but leave me alone!"

"Don't you think, gentlemen," said Travin, laughingly, addressing the assembly, "that Baron Felich does not take offence very easily, and is even as patient as a camel."

"Take care Travin, or I shall have to teach you a lesson," said Felich, his face livid with fury. "For several days already you have been. . . ."

"And for several days I have been seeking an opportunity to teach you a lesson," retorted Travin interrupting him. "After fleecing Ensign Polchaninov in the way you did today, this becomes absolutely necessary. And so, Mr. Baron, at the rendezvous tomorrow morning, at the bridge, in the St. Petersburg Suburb."

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* Hell and thunder! You are an utter scamp!

"Very well, Mr. Travin!" answered Felich. "What's your weapon?"

"Pistols, of course!"

"I prefer swords."

"You lie! You will fight with pistols!" retorted Travin, the smile fading from his lips. "If you don't come with pistols, I shall put a bullet through your hide, you cad!"

"And I'll compel you to fight with swords, you rascal! Otherwise I'll lop your ears off!"

Polchaninov and the Lieutenant of Dragoons in the dark-green coat shook hands. They were to be seconds. Suddenly, the door opened with a bang and the tall and majestic figure of General Yermolov appeared on the threshold with a Major and an orderly behind him. The General walked straight to the scene of action, a stern frown clouding his face and an angry glint in his grey eyes.

"Disgraceful!" he said in his deep, penetrating voice. "The flower of the Guards! The Commanders-in-Chief's aides-de-camp. Artillerymen—bone of my bone! To mar with quarrels and duels this great year, so fraught with danger for our country and so pregnant with impending brilliant victories, which will go down from generation to generation and be remembered forever!"

He glanced at the would-be duellists, who stood with lowered heads. Felich wanted to say something, but the General interrupted him.

"I am not surprised at you," he said, and turning to the other two officers he observed reproachfully: "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Gentlemen, you are arrested! Hand your swords to the Major!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The circumstance that Colonel Tol, despite his relatively low rank as a staff officer, occupied the post of Quartermaster-General of the First Army and, in conjunction with the Commander-in-Chief and his Chief of Staff, was the mainspring of its operations, was certainly unusual. Two reasons were assigned to it. Some attributed it to Tol's amazing industry and rare abilities, others to the special favour in which he was held by General Barclay, who was intimate with nobody, but placed such trust in Tol that it almost verged on friendship and love. Everybody had become accustomed to the Colonel's exceptional position in the Army except himself. He was blessed with neither birth nor wealth. It was known that his father, who lived in Narva, suffered want. Tol was the type of man who "hewed his way to fortune," and his good fortune had turned his head. Tireless and active, audacious and efficient, he was at the same time hot-tempered and stubborn, proud and haughty. He had a habit of speaking in short, jerky, peremptory phrases. Sometimes he was even abrupt with Generals. But this stern, uncompromising efficiency served as a cloak for shrewd calculation and a certain low cunning.

Until lately Tol had willingly accepted Barclay's disinterested patronage and had repaid it by tireless industry. But here, in Smolensk, the Colonel, for the first time, was made to feel that his relations with Barclay had an unpleasant side. This happened on the day the Tsar's messenger arrived at General Headquarters of the First Army with His Majesty's command to the Minister for War immediately to commence decisive operations and to defend Smolensk with the combined forces of the two Armies. This placed Barclay in an extremely awkward and unfavourable position. Tol found himself in exactly the same position.

Before reaching Smolensk Barclay had had more than one opportunity of attacking the enemy, but the Emperor, fearing that his armies would be defeated one by one, had insisted that Barclay should join Bagrattion, and would not hear of any offensive operations being undertaken before this was accomplished. Up to that moment the Emperor's mood had fully coincided with Barclay's plans, in so far as instinct and cool calculation can coincide at all. Naturally, the Minister's independent character and sterling honesty were totally unaffected by the murmuring of his troops or the protests of Bagrattion. In retreating, Barclay had firmly and consistently done what he had deemed was necessary, knowing that in an extremity he could shield himself behind the Emperor. Tol, too, felt safe under the circumstances. Now, however, everything was changed. The Emperor's mood and the Commander-in-Chief's plans diverged. Barclay was of the opinion that whatever opportunities had existed for conducting offensive operations had now been lost. The French Corps were marching toward Smolensk from different directions, and in view of their relative weakness the two Russian Armies were doomed to destruction under the blows of the combined French forces. An offensive was now out of the question, and, consequently, it was useless attempting to defend Smolensk. The Emperor, however, emboldened by the fact that his two armies had joined, was now demanding an offensive. Tol was convinced that the stubborn War Minister would not stop the retreat either to please the Tsar or to silence the murmuring of the troops. Up to now Barclay had acted in conformity with the Emperor's wishes; from now on, however, he would act on his own responsibility, contrary to His Majesty's commands. He might thereby save the Army, but he would encompass his own doom. He would be unable to retain the post of Commander-in-Chief without the Emperor's support, and if Barclay went, what would become of Tol?

These thoughts greatly disturbed the Colonel. They also disturbed Barclay, but in a different way. Barclay was well aware that the Army detested him, and this could not but cause him pain. Indeed he suffered very keenly. Often, very often, he pondered over his position and asked himself whether it would not be expedient to give up the burden of leadership and hand over the command to Bagrattion, to the joy of the entire Army. Was it ambition that prevented him from doing so? No! It was firmness. Bagrattion was carried away by his passionate desire to achieve victory. His supporters looked too self-confidently into the future. But Barclay perceived the real danger and would not discard the arduous role which destiny had chosen for him. He must save Russia, come what may!

Tol, however, had no intention of sharing in his patron's downfall.

* * *

Barclay stepped out of his office leaving His Majesty's messenger and the Quartermaster-General of the First Army *tête-à-tête*. Tol did not lose a moment. He knew exactly what tone to adopt to lead the conversation into the channel he desired.

"Our Commander-in-Chief," he said, "is a man of noble character, wise, learned, brave and efficient. But I cannot understand how he could take command against Napoleon. Why, the entire Russian Army heartily dislikes him!"

"I am in possession of certain information about this," answered the Tsar's messenger, "but probably you know more."

A faint smile hovered on Tol's full lips.

"Indeed, I do!" he answered. "Here is a recent incident. Last night, in Ciappo's, the Guards officers sang a French song, every word of which is an insult to the Commander-in-Chief. One can have no respect for a person whom one derides. Consequently. . . . There is no need for me to add any more. True, this song was composed by one of Prince Bagrattion's aides, but it is sung with equal gusto by the Guards Corps of the First Army. Generally speaking. . . ."

But at this moment Barclay re-entered the room, accompanied by General Yermolov. The latter looked keenly at the two men. Tol smiled.

"You must have been saying something interesting, Karl Fedorovich," said the Chief of Staff, evidently trying to force the Quartermaster-General to the wall by the suddenness of his attack. "Guards Corps. . . . Generally speaking. . . ."

Continuing to smile, Tol cleverly caught up the last words.

"Generally speaking," he said, "the part Prince Bagrattion's General Headquarters are playing in fanning passion is obvious! . . ." Turning heavily towards Barclay, he continued: "I have in mind, Your Excellency, the distressful case of a certain letter, copies of which are being circulated among the officers by Prince Bagrattion's aides."

"I have a copy of this letter," observed the Tsar's messenger. "It is to be regretted that General Bagrattion resorts to such chicanery."

He, too, turned towards Barclay and continued: "I am fairly familiar with His Majesty's opinion of such conduct. Your Excellency has only to report to His Majesty what matters the Staff of the Second Army concerns itself with for Prince Bagrattion to receive marks of His Majesty's disapproval."

Barclay sat huddled in his armchair, his chin resting on his chest. During the last few days he had heard talk about this unfortunate letter on all sides. He himself had sent that letter to Bagrattion at the beginning of the war, little suspecting that this slight, though indiscreet, favour would grow into a piece of malicious chicanery. But could Bagrattion be capable of a thing like this? Much as he disliked Prince Peter Ivanovich, it seemed to him base and mean to doubt his integrity now, under the influence of the rumours that were circulating in the Staffs, and he would have been sincerely grateful to anybody who would dispel these malevolent suspicions. And, as if seeking for such a one, he raised his head and scanned the faces of the men gathered in the room.

Tol was pleased with the course the conversation had taken, and pleased with himself. While Barclay had been out of the room he had succeeded, by means of the story he had told about the offensive song the officers were singing, in dissociating himself in the eyes of the Tsar's messenger from his patron. And when Barclay re-entered the room, he had, with equal celerity and skill, removed all possibility of the latter suspecting his treachery by telling the story about the letter, to the discredit of Bagrattion. That's the way to do things! As for the Tsar's messenger, he was perfectly well aware how highly the Emperor prized the zeal of those of his courtiers who communicated to him for his amusement the gossip and scandal that circulated in the Army. His Majesty showed particular interest in the squabbles among the Generals. Consequently, the Tsar's messenger was not only pleased but even grateful to Tol for what he had communicated to him.

Barclay allowed his gaze to rest on Yermolov. Alexei Petrovich's wise face bore that specifically all-understanding expression which was peculiar to him alone, and, as if in answer to the War Minister's silent appeal, he said, firmly and emphatically:

"Last night, gentlemen, in Ciappo's I arrested the officers who had quarrelled over this notorious letter. I have already briefly reported this to Mikhail Bogdanovich, but now I must add the following: copies of this letter are being circulated not by Prince Peter Ivanovich or by his aides, but by General Rayevsky's son, an Ensign of the 5th Chasseur Regiment. He, and he alone, is guilty. Hence, Colonel Tol should draw the moral that while it is human to err, one should not blame others for one's errors. This is exactly what has happened in this case. *Unglaublich, aber doch!* *

Yermolov laughed. Barclay silently squeezed his hand. He very rarely expressed his pleasure in words, but at such moments his eyes expressed the most paternal tenderness and benevolence. If he were able to put in words what his eyes expressed, nobody could accuse him of being cold and heartless. Just now he was extremely happy. Yermolov had removed a heavy burden from his heart. His pale lips parted and he said:

"That's splendid, gentlemen! I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Alexei Petrovich. Please visit Prince Peter Ivanovich tomorrow and warn him of the discredit this unfortunate letter may bring upon him if any malicious person takes it into his head to use it for that purpose. If something is conscientiously and properly explained to a man he is glad to see reason. Urge the Prince to put a curb on his passion. As for Ensign Rayevsky, perhaps it would be as well to punish him, but I leave that to the Prince."

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* Incredible, but true.

* * *

The Cesarevitch Constantine woke up in a very bad mood. He sat at his bedroom window wrapped in a long white gown and gazed fixedly into the street, paying no heed to the questions timidly put to him by his aides and servants. These fits of bad temper occurred to His Highness rather often, and the members of his suite dreaded them. It was painful and humiliating to have to deal with him when he was in that mood. He was extremely capricious and irritable, and the things he did exasperated him no less than those around him. At the slightest cause, and sometimes for no cause at all, he flew into an ungovernable rage. At such moments his eyes became bloodshot and his voice husky, dropping from its usual pitch to the lowest bass. Recalling these fits of rage in his calmer moments the Cesarevitch himself would say:

"My life is like a magic lantern in which the Devil now and again extinguishes the light."

Prince Constantine sat all alone at the window, succumbing more and more to the mixed feelings of groundless rage and hopeless boredom that gripped his broad, but sunken chest like a vice. He should have dressed and breakfasted long ago, but he felt no desire to do either the one or the other, and this seemed only to increase his ire. People were passing up and down the street, but they were drab and uninteresting, and the very sight of them increased his boredom. Suddenly he rubbed his eyes, jumped up and poked his head out of the window. At last something out of the ordinary met his gaze. Across the square, straight towards the house, two officers were marching under escort. One was in the uniform of the Chevalier Guards, and the other in that of the Horse Guards, both were without their swords.

"Why, yes, these must be the two fellows that General Yermolov arrested the other day for wanting to fight a duel," said the Prince to himself. "Now they're coming to me to be dealt with. Oh! Shan't I make them smart!" The prospect of being able to vent his spleen upon the two officers acted like a tonic upon him.

"Hey!" he called, his husky voice echoing through the house. "Hey! I want to dress!"

His servants, followed by his orderlies and aides-de-camp, hastened into the room. Prince Constantine was Colonel-in-Chief of the Life Guards, and, consequently, one of the aides in attendance on him that day was Cornet Prince Golitsin. The latter entered the room, came smartly to attention and reported:

"The arrested officers von Klingfer and Olferyev have arrived in answer to Your Highness's summons!"

The Cesarevitch waved his hand but made no reply. His shaggy brows, of a queer straw colour, which gave to his snub-nosed face an expression of sombre severity, twitched with impatience. He hurried with his toilet, eager to make it hot for the two arrested officers. As the process of dressing drew to a close, however, his anger and vexation seemed to evaporate, and as he stood in his spencer, ready to be helped into his coat, with the huge, white St. George's Cross Second Class suspended from his neck, "Prince

Makarelli" clearly discerned a pleasant smile on his face, which indicated that His Highness's fit of bad temper had passed.

As was always the case on such occasions, with the passing of the Prince's bad mood the comical figure of His Highness's Chief of Staff appeared at the door. Major General Kuruta was short and obese, and looked for all the world like a globe placed upon short, crooked, but rapidly moving legs. He had a large head, a long nose, a swarthy face, hair as fuzzy as a Negro's, and dull black eyes like olives which had been kept too long on the grocer's shelf. Kuruta was a Greek and had been the Cesarevitch's instructor in Greek in those far off days when the Empress Catherine II dreamed of restoring the Byzantine Empire for her grandson.

"I wish you good health, Your Highness!" he said. "Good day and good health!"

The appearance of his Chief of Staff completely restored the Cesarevitch's composure. His frown disappeared, and the smile on his lips drove the last traces of severity from his face. He loved the old man with amazing and absolutely childish ardour. He ran to him, grasped his small wrinkled hand and implanted on it a prolonged kiss. Kuruta tenderly patted his pupil on the back.

"Tell me, friend, Dmitri Dmitrich," asked the Cesarevitch, "what are Barclay's intentions? Will he let my brother down? I cannot possibly believe though, that this Quaker really intends to defend Smolensk!"

Kuruta laughed slyly and replied: "He is the sort of man who harnesses his horses slowly and rides still more slowly."

"Why the devil does he tell us his fairy tales then? Does he think we are children?" asked the Prince.

"Not only children like fairy tales, Your Highness. Grownups like them, too. Barclay knows that very well, so he tells them!"

The Cesarevitch chuckled and said:

"*Craeco fides nulla.** But this time you are right, Dmitri Dmitrich, absolutely. Let us go to the arrested officers."

Klingfer and Olferyev stood stiffly at attention, looking straight before them. The Cesarevitch approached within a few paces of them without uttering a word and looked each of them up and down from head to foot. He knew them both very well. Klingfer's father was chief of the St. Petersburg Cadet Corps, and he knew Olferyev as an officer of the Horse Guards. He wanted to be formal, however.

"What have you fellows been up to?" he said addressing them. "Duelling, eh? You deserve to be put in the lock-up! You thought that because you are aides-de-camp of the Commanders-in-Chief I could not get at you! You were mistaken! As long as you are wearing the Guards uniform, and as long as the Imperial Russian Guard is under my command, I have the whiphand over you. Don't forget that!"

Kuruta gently touched the Cesarevitch's arm. The latter felt the warning touch and corrected himself.

"That is, I meant to say, gentlemen, that you are my subordinates, and you cannot get out of it. If anyone else were in my place, God knows how hot he would have made it for you for your duelling tricks. All I am concerned about are the interests of the service. I am not concerned about anything else. You can wring each other's necks for all I care. But we are at war now. And what a war! You are soldiers. To shed your blood in vain is a crime against your country, because only to your country does your blood belong. I've heard that two infantry officers also intended to fight. One of them I know—Felich. An old dog! You can't knock any sense into him even if you hit him over the head with a club. But you! Anybody else in my place would have made you smart, but I will refrain. All I say is: General Barclay de Tolly promises to put up a fight for Smolensk. He has let us down more than once, but it will be difficult for him to do so this time, because His Majesty wishes him to give battle. And so we shall fight. Here is an arena for honourable combat. Here, by your courage, can you earn the gratitude of your country. If you come out of the battle with honour and with whole skins—God be with you, fight each other as much as you like, even with your bare fists for all I care; but don't dare to do anything of the kind before the battle! I, the Grand Duke, your Tsar's brother, forbid it! Have I your word, Klingfer?"

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* Put no faith in a Greek.

"My word of honour, Your Imperial Highness!"

"Have I your word, Olferyev?"

"My word of honour, Your Imperial Highness!"

"That's more like it. Is that right, Dmitri Dmitrich?"

"That's right, Your Highness," answered Kuruta, "Lycurgus would not have made a better judge."

"I should say not!" answered the Prince smugly. "And now I release both officers from arrest. Return them their swords!"

CHAPTER TWENTY

"It's not for the War Minister to judge me! The whole world and posterity—these are my judges! I live for glory, and glory is like the sun; it cannot bear being looked at with insolent eyes. Hence this intrigue. True, this letter is a bad business, but what have I to fear? The Army knows Bagrattion and will not believe this scandal; and that is the important thing for me. It is not those who strive for honours who are honourable, but those to whom honours come. I tell you, namesake, the War Minister plays too much on his chivalry, but you can't catch me that way. I am not a courtier. I serve not the Court, but Russia! The War Minister's counsels suit me as a saddle suits a cow. I cannot punish that whippersnapper Rayevsky. I will tell his father, and he will take him in hand. What should I punish him for? He is a patriot, and has done no harm. Let the War Minister watch his own men. I would very much like to know, however, what his feelings are now that he has received His Majesty's command to attack. How many opportunities he has missed! But who is to blame? A good strategist must always remember that swift success is the best economy. But he. . . ."

After inducing General Barclay to issue the order to stop the retreat, Prince Bagrattion showed signs of having become reconciled with the War Minister. He could not do otherwise. He could not give people grounds for thinking that the question of precedence was the cause of friction between the two Commanders-in-Chief. He was therefore obliged to swallow his pride and conceal his vexation at the Tsar's decision to appoint Barclay Commander-in-Chief of the two armies; but these efforts to combat his feelings did not diminish his dislike for Barclay. On the contrary. For the moment, it is true, he was satisfied. Fate seemed to have taken revenge on the War Minister for him. The Emperor's command to commence offensive operations greatly embarrassed Barclay, but it strengthened Bagrattion's hand, and he became more persistent in his demands. How petty the War Minister was, however! In extremely grave circumstances like the present he occupied himself with trivial matters like Battaglia's letter! And yet he had the presumption to offer advice! He behaved like a condemned man on the way to the gallows who muffles himself up for fear of catching cold!

"You are wrong in attacking the War Minister like that, Prince Peter Ivanovich," said Yermolov in a low voice. "He behaved very handsomely in that business with the letter and, generally speaking, he is a man of lofty virtue. He is not the only one to blame. There are others who are tainted with evil. What do you say to writing to the Tsar?"

Bagrattion swung round with such vigour that his chair creaked.

"Write to the Tsar? What about?" he roared. "Not about this gossip and scandal, surely! I have written to him, informing him that I had joined the Minister for War, and advising him to have only one Commander-in-Chief, but I have received no reply. That is, I have simply been snubbed again. What else there is to write to him about I have no idea. If I bluntly request that I be put in command over both armies, His Majesty will think that I am prompted by ambition. But I am prompted not by ambition, but by my love for Russia. Barclay does not love our country, and nobody could act more to the enemy's advantage than he is doing. Ekh! He is irresolute, timid, fatuous and slow—all bad qualities. He may be suitable enough as Minister for War, but as a General, he is useless. We shall see what he will do next. If he is allowed to remain in command, he will bring the guest right into the capital. No! I tell you straight, namesake, better to be a common soldier than a Commander-in-Chief under Barclay!"

Yermolov remained silent. When fire and water come into contact steam is produced. Was not something of the kind happening now? And the steam was very hot. If he did not take care he would be scalded.

"Do as you think fit, Prince," he said at last. "You can judge best. But make an example of young Rayevsky. This will be the best way of stopping all this gossip and scandal about yourself. Do that, I urge you!"

Bagrattion was about to retort when Count de Saint-Priest, the Chief of Staff, entered the room. There was a smile on his handsome face, and there was something in his gait that is observed only in men who feel they have done absolutely the right thing in absolutely the right way. His radiant blue eyes, turned directly on Bagrattion, seemed to say: "Well, why don't you thank me for the excellent service I have rendered you? Is it not time to cast away all suspicion about me?"

"A strange thing happened today," he said. "I have already received the report about it from Count Mikhail Vorontsov, the commander of the mixed Grenadier Division."

With that he solemnly placed a document before Bagrattion.

"The Count reports," he continued, "that in talking about General Barclay in the presence of numerous officers Ensign of the 5th Chasseur Regiment, Alexander Rayevsky, Nikolai Nikolayevich's son, gave utterance to the following words: 'He is an Englishman, and if you scratch him, you will find a Tatar, but where is the Russian?' Many of the officers standing around openly expressed their amusement at this."

Yermolov burst into a roar of laughter.

Saint-Priest shrugged his shoulders.

"I would like to borrow some of Your Excellency's merriment," he said, "because I see very little that is amusing in this incident. An Ensign cannot be allowed to make fun of a General, and since he has done that, he must answer for it, otherwise discipline will suffer. That is my opinion."

After a brief pause he turned to Bagrattion and, addressing his remarks to him alone, said:

"Submitting Count Vorontsov's report to you for Your Excellency's consideration, I, as commander of the 5th Chasseur Regiment, of which Rayevsky is a junior officer, add my own opinion as follows: the Ensign ought to be confined to the guardroom until the regiment sets out on the march. He should then follow the regimental chest for the duration of three marches. I suggest the latter as a warning to the other officers not to commit a misdemeanour of this kind. I trust that this opinion of mine will meet with Your Excellency's fullest approval."

Having said this Saint-Priest screwed up his eyes expectantly.

"This is matchless, Count!" exclaimed Yermolov. "And above all, very shrewd. It's high time young Rayevsky was taken in hand!"

He offered Bagrattion a pen, but the Prince shook his head.

"Human wisdom has become quite commonplace nowadays, and we meet with it oftener than with anything else. Count Mikhail is a paragon of wisdom, and I believe that Rayevsky's son has designs of becoming a professor. It is not for nothing that you, namesake, are called Pater Gruber. Count Emmanuel Franzevich has collected wisdom from all over Europe. Everybody is clever nowadays. The stupid ones have become so rare as to be worth their weight in gold; and of these, I am the first."

He picked up a pen and drew a cross over Vorontsov's report.

"I cannot give this my approbation," he said. "Perhaps I ought, but I cannot. I will settle the matter with Count Mikhail myself; and I shall ask Nikolai Nikolayevich to talk to his clever offspring like a father. But enough! I don't want to hear any more about this business. The trouble is that we allow a trivial thing like this to obscure really important matters. Dear namesake, I beg of you with tears in my eyes, do something about it, for God's sake! Get more men! The more able-bodied men we get into the ranks the more we shall be able to do. Write to Kaluga. Miloradovich has mustered quite a lot of recruits there. Order him to send them here without delay. Write to Count Rostopchin in Moscow to form a militia. Call on the peasants to give us information about the enemy's whereabouts. Do something about it, I most humbly beg of you!"

* * *

Yielding to circumstances, General Barclay, on July 26th, called a Council of War to discuss the question of an immediate offensive. He himself had no need for such a discussion. The extreme danger of offensive operations was perfectly obvious to him. But he wanted to act in a way that would give nobody grounds for saying that the Commander-in-Chief ignored the opinion of his Generals. He was well aware of these opinions, so much so, that at the Council he scarcely paid any attention to what the Generals said. He sat there silent, with pallid face and half-shut eyes, sideways to the window, through which, as in a picture slightly obscured by the storm clouds gathering in the sky, could be seen the city and the Dnieper. The bright sunny day was slowly giving way to the melancholy dusk of an evening that presaged a storm. Candles were brought in, but as the daylight still lingered, they gave the room a funereal appearance. Bagrattion ordered them to be extinguished.

"There are few French troops at Porechye and also at Velizh," Yermolov was saying. "In Surazh, there is only Prince Eugene with his Corps. In Rudnya there is Murat with his cavalry; but there are no infantry there. Davout is making scarcely any progress towards Orsha. Bonaparte and his Guards are still in Vitebsk. The French troops are scattered over a wide area. They cannot be expecting an attack on our part. They will require at least three days to muster in order to put up resistance, and the forces which are further away will never reach the battlefield in time. We can get into contact with the enemy within two days. A better opportunity for attack could scarcely be wished for. In my opinion everything favours success. A hundred and thirty thousand Russians with love for their Motherland in their hearts and a thirst for vengeance. . . ."

"*L'armée ne demande rien tant que de se trouver face à face avec ses ennemis*,"* interjected Saint-Priest in a low voice to egg Yermolov on.

The commander of the 5th Infantry Corps, short, simple-hearted, round-faced and apple-cheeked General of Infantry Dokhturov, fidgeted in his chair. This General always thought and spoke disjointedly.

"I can answer for myself. . . . I mean, not for myself—for my troops. And for myself too! Ready to die! Sentiments. . . . What about them? Must go into battle. Sacramento!"

Ataman Platov was also sparing in words; he did not wriggle or stutter. He simply said:

"No need to ask me! I was at Suvorov's Council of War at Ismail. I was a Brigadier then, the youngest in rank present, and so I was the first to answer: 'Attack!' D'you think I'll say anything different now?"

---

* The Army is thirsting to come face to face with the enemy.

Unlike all preceding conferences of this kind, this one was unanimous. There was no debate, nor was there room for any. Barclay raised no objections. Stroking his injured arm, which began to ache for no explicable reason, he merely said: "We ought to get a little more information about the enemy than our outposts and scouts can obtain. . . ."

Bagrattion flared up at this, his black, arched eyebrows rising to the top of his forehead.

"Must we capture Bonaparte before we can defeat Davout?" he exclaimed. "Nobody but Mr. Bonaparte can tell us all that Mikhail Bogdanovich wishes to know. And since Bonaparte will not surrender to us, shall we never turn against Davout?"

Many of the Generals present laughed at this, and none more heartily than the Cesarevitch Constantine Pavlovich. Picking up the printed dispositions of the two Armies from the table he put them to his nose and smelt them, at the same time winking with boyish impudence in the direction of the War Minister.

"Attack!" exclaimed Bagrattion in an imperative voice. "Attack without hesitation! Caution! That too is needed. During the past few days my Army has received an additional seven battalions. I therefore propose that General Neverovsky's 27th Infantry Division be despatched to the town of Krasny to keep observation over the Orsha-Smolensk Road. True, the Division consists of raw recruits and eighteen-year-old ensigns, but they will lay down their lives if need be and not budge an inch. I propose this as a measure of precaution. For the attack. . . ."

In the hurly-burly of multitudinous affairs, the issuing of orders and debate, the Prince had not had time to analyse his thoughts in detail. And now, remembering the need for caution, he merely proposed that Neverovsky's Division be despatched to the left bank of the Dnieper and left it at that. His ardent determination, which circumstances had so long kept under restraint, now swept him beyond this important question to that of attacking Davout and, perhaps, Napoleon himself. While leading his Army to Smolensk and meeting the French forces single-handed, he had acted differently. Then, he had skilfully upset the enemy's plans and, wriggling like a serpent, had at last managed to escape from his clutches without a general engagement. Then he had been more cautious. Now, however, in proposing that Neverovsky's Division be despatched to keep the Orsha Road under observation he did so, strictly speaking, not so much because he thought that this was essential, but because he wanted to take the wind out of Barclay's sails and to forestall any objections he might raise. But Barclay raised no objections. Bagrattion bent over towards the Cesarevitch and insinuatingly whispered in his ear:

"I think, Your Highness, the chief enemy is beaten. It now remains to finish off the other one."

The Cesarevitch again laughed heartily.

If there were any Generals among those present who still had any confidence in Barclay as a military commander, his cold and impassive indifference to the proceedings must have killed it. He sat gazing through the window, saying not a word either in favour of an attack or of continuing to avoid battle, refraining from all argument, and taking no part in the discussion. In the vicinity, the Dnieper was as bright as on a clear midday, but beyond the city it was as grey as during a cloudy dawn. The weather was breaking, the rain was sweeping rapidly from where the Dnieper loomed so sinister and grey. And so—an attack! Barclay had scarcely any doubt that it would fail. But what was worse, even a successful advance would bring no practical results. Barclay was convinced that Napoleon and his main forces would make a detour of Smolensk across the Dnieper, precisely at the spot where the storm that was threatening the city was brewing. If Napoleon did that, disaster was inevitable. Smolensk would perish, and after it, the Army that had abandoned it. An attack was suicidal. He had but one alternative: to pretend that he was resigned to the decision. Barclay sighed softly and rose from his chair.

"I thank you, gentlemen!" he said. "It has been unanimously decided to attack. The order will be issued at once. Tonight, both Armies will leave Smolensk for the village of Rudnya to enter into a general engagement with the enemy. March in three columns. First Army in two columns; Second Army—one. Tomorrow I shall have my Headquarters in the village of Prikaz-Vydra. To you, Prince Peter Ivanovich, I recommend the village of Katan."

A murmur of approbation ran through the Council Chamber. The faces of the Generals beamed. The Cesarevitch embraced Bagrattion, his lips trembling with emotion. Barclay alone remained calm and appeared to be almost indifferent. He slowly raised his hand toward the window. All eyes turned in the same direction. The sky and the very air over the town had assumed the hue of murky water. A fine rain was beating against the window panes. Smolensk was enveloped in gloom.

"Mr. Quartermaster-General!" said Barclay, addressing that officer. "The rain will spoil the roads tonight. Do you undertake to bring the troops to Rudnya?"

Tol, thinking that he had grasped the hidden meaning of Barclay's gesture, and amazed at the wonderful composure of this man, sprang to attention and replied:

"I undertake to do so in any weather, Your Excellency!"

"Very good!" said Barclay. "I am particularly grateful to General of Infantry, Prince Bagrattion, for his very valuable proposal to despatch the 27th Infantry Division to the left bank of the Dnieper for observation purposes. I will add the following, however: our advance to Rudnya will be made in three marches. If the enemy is not discovered in this area and no encounter takes place with him, the advance will stop."

"So that's his game, is it?"—said Tol to himself.

The Commander-in-Chief bowed coldly and left the room.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The First Army advanced on Rudnya in two columns and, to the left of it, the Second Army marched along the bank of the Dnieper to the village of Katan and along the Porechye Highroad. Not since the commencement of hostilities had the troops been in such good spirits, which neither the mud, the intense darkness, the piercing wind nor the slanting streaks of cold rain could dampen. The more the rain beat in their faces, the merrier the soldiers became, and they retorted to the howling of the wind with merry quips and jests. The troops were indeed thirsting to meet the enemy and eager to go into battle.

On July 27, one day's march from Rudnya, both armies halted. A halt? Why? To give the French a chance of uniting their forces? There were no few rascals at General Headquarters. What if Napoleon learned of this move? Strange, very strange. Perhaps a new plan of offensive operations had matured in General Barclay's head? But why a new plan when everything so far had favoured the execution of the original one? Information had just been received that Ataman Platov had routed Ney's vanguard consisting of six regiments of cavalry under the command of General Sebastiani. This had occurred at the village of Inkovo, and also at Molevo Boloto. Platov drove the French right up to Leshnya and even reached Rudnya, which he found deserted. French prisoners of war arrived—a Colonel, seven other officers, and three hundred troopers, and all unanimously testified that the French commanders were unaware of the Russians' intention to launch an offensive and were not prepared to meet it. The halt had not yet done any harm, but it was extremely dangerous.

On receiving the order to halt, Bagrattion flew into a rage and hurriedly despatched numerous orderlies and aides-de-camp, one after another, with messages to Barclay. What these messages contained nobody knew; but the Commander-in-Chief must have been extremely put out when he read them. His replies were very strange: he had found the water and communications bad at the village of Prikaz-Vydra, where he had halted, and so he had decided to transfer his Headquarters to the village of Moshchinki, on the Porechye Highroad, eighteen versts from Smolensk. Information had been received of the approach of large enemy forces and these had already been sighted near Porechye, on the First Army's right flank, and also, it was reported, near Katan, almost on top of the Second Army.

"What of that?" asked the men and the officers. "Platov was not afraid. . . . Aren't we going to fight the French no matter what their numbers are?"

The appearance of the French could not have been the reason why the advance was halted, they argued. This was only a pretext, chosen at random. Any other might have served the purpose, the rain and wind that were beating in their faces. Barclay had chosen the pretext that the French had put in an appearance.

"Good Lord, what a Commander-in Chief we have! A veritable Fabius Procrastinator, devil take him!"

— This *mot*, uttered during a long and tedious bivouac, flew from regiment to regiment like a flash.

"Fabius Cunctator! . . . Barclay is Fabius Cunctator!"

This nickname now stuck to Barclay. Only few knew its meaning, or even whose name it was, but its foreignness sounded sinister, offensive and derisive, and it was applied to Barclay simply as a term of abuse. Bagrattion remained the only hope.

Bagrattion regarded Barclay's indecision as but another of the detestable traits of the latter's character—timidity and excessive caution. No, not only caution! It was something worse! All day long Prince Peter paced up and down his tent in mortal vexation and heaviness of heart, his entire Staff watching his outbursts of wrath with sympathy and understanding. Fabius could not be depended upon! His incoherent messages could not be trusted! Faint hearts see danger lurking even where there is none. Not so Bagrattion!

At last Prince Peter determined to ascertain what it was precisely that Barclay feared. For this purpose he ordered a light detachment of two battalions of the Smolensk Infantry Regiment and several squadrons of cavalry to make a night reconnaissance on the other side of Katan. It was already dusk when Bagrattion left his tent to watch the departure of the detachment. It was raining harder than ever, the ground had been converted into a quagmire, but the men were in excellent spirits. The horses looked well fed, and a fodder bag, full of oats was fastened to every man's saddle.

"Mount! Eyes left! In fours, by the right, march!"

"God speed!" Bagrattion called after them. "I shall not sleep this night, waiting for your return, my friends."

The detachment rode as far as the Katan Woods without taking any special measures of precaution. The light clatter of the horses' hoofs, the lively conversation of the men and the rattle of the Hussars' sabres broke the stillness, and here and there the officers' pipes glowed in the darkness. In the woods, however, they had to be more cautious. The guides who were leading the detachment stated that several of their neighbours who had gone to Smolensk the previous day had seen French troops on the other side of the clearing. There was no cause for doubting the trustworthiness of these guides. They were three peasants from the village of Rossassna, three true Russians, honest, shrewd and daring to a degree.

No sound so treacherously betrays the movements of troops at night as that of the human voice. The human voice! The chirping of a bird is sometimes heard a verst away at night!

"Swords to hips!" Lieutenant-Colonel Davidov commanded his Hussars. "Quiet, lads, not a twitter!"

The silence became deathlike; not a twig snapped, not a leaf rustled, and one would have needed the ears of a wild deer to hear the horses champing their bits. The trees began to thin out and glade followed glade, a sure sign that the outskirts were near at hand.

. . . It did not take much to set trooper Tsioma roaring with laugther. Sometimes, for no apparent reason, he would jump up so suddenly as to make the men and horses near him start with surprise, and begin to wheeze and hiss like an old grandfather's clock about to strike, to splutter and cough and double up in an effort to suppress his mirth. As the detachment was making its way through the woods Tsioma's sideman bent over towards him and whispered:

"I gave you a biscuit the other day; now you give me a bit o'baccy!"

This innocent request, made under those circumstances, nearly knocked the mirthful giant out of his saddle. He spluttered and snorted, but try as he might he could not suppress a loud guffaw which echoed and re-echoed through the woods. Davidov happened to be near.

"Silence, you brute!" he hissed and, raising his sheathed sabre over Tsioma's head, he brought it down with a crash. The blow came down on the trooper's neck. And what a blow! Tsioma resented it very much indeed. He would not have minded if it had been because he had had a drop too much and had been found drunk while on duty, but this was for nothing at all!

The harm done was irreparable, however. The alarm was heard on the outskirts of the woods. Trumpets sounded, followed a moment later by the heavy clatter of cavalry hoofs. Soon a number of French officers with trumpeters behind them came galloping at the head of a squadron of Cuirassiers in white greatcoats and dully glinting casques and appeared in front of Davidov's Hussars as suddenly as if they had sprung from the ground. Tsioma's horse reared. The laughing giant drew his sabre; the sound of clashing swords and pistol shots was already heard around him. The foes hacked at each other with great gusto, and when a Hussar struck a head his sabre cleaved down to his foeman's brow, to his shoulder, and even to his waist. In this turmoil Davidov pranced about like the Devil in inferno.

* * *

Meanwhile, the Cossacks and the infantry had emerged on the other side of the wood. There was no Tsioma among them, and so they succeeded in reaching the French camp without raising an alarm and came down upon it like a bolt from the blue. Thus, while the Hussars were engaging the Cuirassiers, the infantry attacked the French baggage train, while the Cossacks scoured the camp, hunting down the fugitives. Whose camp? Whose baggage? This was ascertained in the most extraordinary way.

Kuzma Vorozheikin, the Don Cossack Sergeant, and Agei Svatikov, a private of the Smolensk Infantry Regiment, had never met before. Fate brought them together for the first time that night near a luxurious carriage that was standing under a tall pine encircled by a wattle fence. It so happened that the two men looked into the body of this carriage simultaneously from opposite sides. What they found in it was extremely interesting and important. It was a French officer wearing the White Cross of the Legion of Honour. His face clearly expressed fear and disgust. He grasped an enormous pistol in his trembling hand. Both the Cossack and the infantryman pounced upon the Frenchman, but notwithstanding his evident timidity this Chevalier of the Legion of Honour proved to be strong and agile. A shot rang out, and then the heavy butt of a smoking pistol flashed past

Vorozheikin's head. Svatikóv groaned and dropped to the ground, but Kuzma was unharmed. He gripped the Frenchman round the waist with both his powerful arms. Two bodies struggled desperately inside the carriage. Tufts of reddish grey hair flew from Kuzma's long beard, sharp teeth buried themselves in his face, and he felt warm, sticky blood trickling down his whiskers. But he felt no pain; he simply kept hammering at his enemy, muttering the while:

"Take that, and that, you pup! I've been wanting to get at you for a long time."

The "pup" was none other than Captain Vicomte Pionne de Combe.

* * *

Davidov caught sight of the swaying carriage while still some distance away and galloped up to investigate the strange phenomenon. When he arrived on the scene Pionne de Combe's fate was already sealed, for he found Vorozheikin sitting on his prostrate body and tying him with his lasso. The Captain was still making feeble efforts to throw off his hairy rider.

"*Rendez-vous!*" Davidov said to him. "*Vous êtes notre prisonnier.*"*

"*Grâce! Pardon!*"—gasped the prisoner.

He was now standing, trembling and pale with a noose round his neck and with his arms bound, while some Cossacks were binding his feet

"*Monsieur, monsieur!*" he said addressing Davidov. "*On m'a ôté mon sabre d'honneur! De grâce!*"**

Vorozheikin removed from the carriage a number of brief-cases and despatch boxes decorated with coats of arms. The three peasants from Rossassna carried off the bleeding body of Svatikov.

* * *

Next morning the weather was bright and sunny. The birds hiding in the tall grass filled the air with their shrill voices and it seemed as though not they but the fields were singing. The campfire outside General Vassilchikov's tent had not yet died out. Here a dozen or so cavalry officers were gathered round Davidov, who had returned from his expedition to Katan only an hour ago. His face was still grimy with gunpowder and he looked like a chimney sweep, but the officers gazed at him with envious eyes as he vivaciously, and with evident relish, related the events of the previous night.

"Most of my life I have been like a Cossack lance, always in the thick of the fight," he said, "but I have never been in an affair like this before. We passed through the woods—didn't see it for the trees, so to speak—and when we suddenly came upon the Marshal's baggage train, I simply gasped! God, what a scrimmage! An awful mix up. You couldn't see a thing for smoke and dust. But our sabres got a taste of real meat, I can tell you!"

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* Surrender! You are our prisoner!

** Sir, sir! They have taken my sword of honour from me!

The officers listened with bated breath.

"But tell us, Denis," intervened one of them, "how you captured the Duke's carriage!"

Davidov burst out laughing.

"It was not I who captured it, but Vorozheikin, one of Larion Vassilyevich's Cossack escorts." Looking round he spotted Kuzma and called out: "Hey, brother, come here!"

The officers surrounded the Cossack Sergeant, pleading: "Tell us how you captured Marshal Junot's carriage!"

Vorozheikin had never been in such a situation before and was extremely flattered and at the same time confused by the attention paid him. Tell them the story! He was not at home with his neighbours and kinsmen around him, sipping frothy Tsimlyansk wine! He stood twisting and turning for a while and at last he said, both his small sharp eyes and his voice expressing unutterable regret.

"Why, gentlemen, your honours! I haven't the gift of the gab. I can do things, but I am not much good at talking about them!"

These words were met with a roar of cordial laughter. The officers slapped the Sergeant on the back and pushed silver rubles and assignats into his hand. This unexpected success encouraged Kuzma. He became more talkative.

"Our business is to steal upon the enemy, give him a drubbing and then make ourselves scarce," he explained. "We pounce upon him like a hawk on chickens. While the Hussars were slashing and hacking we crept round the back. And there I saw him, lying like a baby in a cradle, his head under the hood and his feet dangling over the side. . . ."

This was followed by another burst of laughter, and laughter punctuated Vorozheikin's tale to the very end.

"But the most important thing," interjected Davidov, "was that in the brief-cases and despatch boxes we took from Junot's carriage we found important papers. The General told me that Prince Peter Ivanovich began to study them as soon as he got them. Among these papers I found a sheaf of the queerest proclamations."

With that Davidov drew a sheet of paper from his pouch.

"Here is one of them," he said. "A most astonishing document. Listen:

"'German oxen.' Oxen, they are called! 'You are marching with the soldiers of the *Grande Armée*. Do not lag behind. The fortune of French arms depends upon you. Are you fat enough to perform deeds of daring and valour? You are the first German oxen to set foot in Russia. Behind the Saxon oxen come the Bavarian, Wurtemburg and Westphalian; then will come the Italian, Hungarian, and others. All are waiting for the signal for the Grand Slaughter. Courage, oxen! Make haste! Soon all the cattle of Europe will envy your laurels. True, you are not equal to Eylau or Friedland oxen, but you have flesh and blood enough! Oxen! A glorious death awaits you. Your hides transformed into boots and shoes, will serve mankind. Your dscendants will low with pride in remembrance of you. Who can deny you profound respect? Signed: Generalissimo Wild Ox."

It was, indeed a very strange document. The only conclusion one could draw from it was that although the French had taken the Germans as their allies, they held them in utter contempt and treated them with scorn and contumely.

The proclamation passed from hand to hand. Meanwhile, Davidov stood lost in thought. He leaned against one of the officer's horses and absentmindedly tapped the rowel of the rider's spur, watching it jingle and revolve on its axis. But though apparently engrossed in this innocent occupation, his thoughts were far away. Never before had he been so absorbed in reverie as he was at this moment, after the hot engagement of the night before.

"What could not be done with two hundred Vorozheikins who would continuously harass the enemy's transports and baggage trains, recruiting depots and straggling units," he mused. "They would operate in localities with which they were closely familiar and they could cling to the enemy like burs. The infantry do not always come up in time, the cavalry cannot always withstand an assault and the artillery often fire aimlessly. What was needed was a small, mobile force. Every raid would be but a small engagement in itself, but numerous skirmishes of this kind would upset all the Frenchmen's plans, and the French Army Corps would be left without communications and without provisions. And how much necessary information could we acquire in this way! How much the enemy would be worn down! Yes, the regular war must be supplemented with irregular, partisan warfare!"

Davidov was so absorbed in his thoughts that he failed to notice the approach of General Vassilchikov, who had just returned from a visit to the Commander-in-Chief. The General's tunic was unbuttoned and his broad chest could be seen rising and falling beneath his snow-white piqué waistcoat. His eyes glistened, his round cheeks were flushed, and his lordly poise revealed that he was extremely pleased. Bagrattion had just thanked him very heartily for the reconnaissance of the preceding night. True, the information obtained confirmed the soundness of General Barclay's apprehensions, but the engagement had been a splendid one. Vassilchikov tugged at Davidov's pelisse and said:

"Enough of dreaming, my dear Colonel. Your plan is impractical. I tell you frankly that I dared not submit your request to the Prince. Guerilla warfare! Nonsense! You are a Hussar, imbued with the Cossack spirit. There's nothing like fighting in the open field, in broad daylight, under shot and shell and galloping in a charge. . . . Your way is. . . ."

He turned to enter his tent, smiling, upright and proud.

Call a lunatic by his name and he will fall. This is what happened to Davidov. He felt as if he, with his brilliant ideas, were dropping from an enormous height into the wretched, commonplace sphere of the dull words uttered by the General.

"Fool!" he thought to himself, meaning Vassilchikov, and then said aloud: "Let him not report my request to the Prince! The Prince has known me since 1807, and we fought together in Turkey. I will go to him myself."

* * *

"Sire,

"Your Majesty has probably already received a report of the slight but nevertheless gallant engagement that took place the other day near the village of Katan. The circumstances under which the Duke d'Abrantes lost his carriage, and important documents with it, are extremely amusing. I have no doubt that one of these documents attracted Your Majesty's special attention. I have in mind the 'Appeal to the German Oxen.' This is a document of immense political importance, for it throws light on the relations between the Allies. It served also as litmus-paper for revealing my relations with Prince Bagrattion. I have already burdened Your Majesty with descriptions of these relations more than once, as you were gracious enough to enquire about them in the greatest detail. Kind fate has brought my humble person as close to you, Sire, as it has removed Prince Bagrattion from you. In speaking of him to you in my letters I have always endeavoured to be as fair as possible. I doubt whether I have penned a single word of direct condemnation, and even now I have no wish to condemn him; but I pray Your Majesty to lend your ear to the story which I shall now unfold.

"Together with Junot's carriage our Cossacks and Hussars captured a French Staff Captain who had formerly served in Marshal Davout's Corps, but, as they had been dissatisfied with him there, he was transferred to Junot. The name of this officer was Vicomte Pionne de Combe. A tall young man of quite prepossessing appearance, he was brought to me for interrogation, and stood before me leaning against the table, his hands in his pockets and his enormous bearskin on his head. His behaviour was arrogant in the extreme. This angered me and I shouted:

"'Take your hat off!'

"He obediently removed his hat and placed it on the table. With that his stature diminished and he at once dropped his defiant bearing. His transformation into a common mortal, a wretched prisoner of war, as he actually was, only served to emphasize the nobility of his features and deportment.

"'Pardon me,' he said. 'Bonaparte has made it a law and custom for military men not to bare their heads anywhere, even in palaces and churches.'

"He referred to the usurper by his surname. This interested me.

"'How is this?' I asked. 'Why do you deny your Emperor his title?'

"'Oh, Count,' he answered with eager readiness. '*C'est Dieu qui m'y a fait penser.** I am glad you noticed it. The Emperor! I hate no man more! Always a brute, but often also a savage beast—*c'est lui!*** I had no opportunity of doing him harm. All I could do was to ridicule him. *Mais le ridicule n'avait jamais tué personne, même les gens qui le méritaient le plus.*'***

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* God put this idea into my head.

** That is he!

*** Ridiculee never killed, least of all those who deserved it most.

"When he told me his name I realized with whom I was dealing. His family are kinsmen of the Marquises of Jumilhac, one of the best families in France; I knew this when I was still a child.

"'*Pourquoi servez-vous des misérables comme ce Napoléon?*'* I asked him.

"Here, with tears in his eyes, he told me the story of his life, a rather common one for French nobles of his age. Pionne de Combe finished his studies at the seminary and was preparing to take Holy Orders, as his family, and he himself, were extremely pious. The whirlwind of revolution upset this plan. The youth found himself in the Revolutionary Army and became a Captain, and a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. This, however, did not prevent him from remaining an ardent and active Royalist. Even here in Russia he missed no opportunity to put his real convictions into practice. He assured me on oath that he was the author of the 'Appeal to the German Oxen.' The unhappy Vicomte touched my heart, which has grown hardened to human suffering. Even at this distance I feel that Your Majesty will also be inclined to sympathize with this poor youth who wandered so long, stumbling in the gloom of an eclipsed and thwarted life. I promised him safety and kind consideration. How grateful he was to me!

"Next day Prince Bagrattion summoned me, and in the course of our conversation reference was made to the Vicomte. From the very first words the Prince uttered I gathered that the very thing that had induced me to treat this officer with sympathy and kindness had turned the Prince against him.

"'What, a Royalist and serving Napoleon?' exclaimed the Prince. 'Excuse me, Count, but if that is the case, he must be a scoundrel!'

"I tried to explain, but the Prince would not hear me.

"'What?' he stormed. 'He, an officer, writes outrageous appeals to the soldiers! This miserable traitor ought to be shot and not be allowed to desecrate our Russian soil!'

"Uttering these cruel and unjust words, the Prince fixed me with such a stare that my head swam, so vividly did I see the bottomless abyss that lay between us. *Pouvais-je soupçonner que l'étroitesse inclairvoyante de cet homme pouvait aller jusque là!*** If my conscience had not been so absolutely clear before Your Majesty and my new-found country, I would have sunk into despair.

"Captain Pionne de Combe was shot at dawn this morning.

"Your Majesty was once gracious enough to express the desire to become acquainted with the diary which I have been keeping for many years. The above is a page from it. I think it is worthy of Your Majesty's attention and as an indication of the strange conflicts that arise among your faithful servants. Prince Bagrattion, General Barclay and I are all ready to lay down our lives for Russia at Your Majesty's command, but when it comes to living and acting there appears to be no harmony of heart and mind among us.

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* Why do you serve such a contemptible person as Napoleon?
** I never dreamed that this man could be so narrow-minded and short-sighted.

I will not conceal from Your Majesty that I shall look forward to a reply to this epistle with the greatest impatience, comparable only with the boundless devotion with which is inspired

Your Imperial Majesty's Adjutant-General
Count Emmanuel de Saint-Priest

General Headquarters of the Second Army.
On the march, in the village of
Prikaz-Vydra, July 28, 1812."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Napoleon decided to recast his whole plan of operations. He conceived the brilliant manoeuvre of immediately abandoning Vitebsk, making a forced march with his main forces to the villages of Rossassna and Khomino, unexpectedly crossing the Dnieper at those points and striking at Smolensk, in Barclay's rear.

And so, the French troops marched from the Dvina to the Dnieper. The roads were so muddy that the men were obliged to help the horses haul the guns and baggage. The delay resulting from this greatly alarmed Napoleon. On July 27 Platov defeated Marshal Ney's vanguard at Molevo Boloto. This caused Napoleon to assume that Barclay had changed his tactics and was himself seeking a general engagement. The Emperor waited two days for the Russians to attack, but he waited in vain. He then resumed the march to the Dnieper, and about two hundred thousand men were mustered at Rossassna and Khomino. On August I Napoleon left Vitebsk. He slept hardly at all on the journey and his coach travelled with hurricane speed.

And so the very thing which Barclay had feared when he pretended to agree to an offensive on the insistence of his Generals came to pass. Smolensk would have been lost in the very beginning of August had not the Russian Commander-in-Chief firmly decided to retreat from the city to a distance not exceeding three days' march. This alone saved Smolensk.

* * *

Rossassna was situated on the bank of the Dnieper behind a dense wood and a stretch of marshland. Just outside the village, right among the peasants' vegetable plots, stood a dilapidated manor house, its timbers blackened and decayed by time. The window frames and doors had been removed long ago and the outbuildings were mere ruins. The house was deserted, and so was the village. Not a dog barked, not a cock crowed, not a cow or a calf was heard. Rossassna seemed dead. About a mile or so from the village, however, the river was teeming with life. Both banks swarmed with French troops. Mountains of reserve pontoons, barrels and coils of rope were piled up everywhere. Infantry units were already crossing the river. Artillery was being lowered to the river by ropes. The cavalry crossed by the ford.

Napoleon was in a hurry. He stood near his dazzling lacquered and gilded carriage and peered through his spyglass, while the wind blew the folds of his greatcoat about his knees. Around him crowded the numerous generals and officers of his suite in their richly embroidered uniforms. They were engaged in an animated whispered conversation and were evidently pleased with the proceedings. Everything was going off splendidly.

Rossassna, however, was not so completely deserted as it seemed. In a large peasant's hut, the last in the village on the side where the French troops were crossing the river, a blind man was sitting in a nook near the stove, weaving a basket. His white, sightless eyes and thin, long-bearded face were turned to the ceiling, while his blackened fingers deftly plaited the twigs. Now and again he raised his hand to his brow to right the band which held his long, greenish-yellow hair, and sighed. He strained his ears to catch the faint murmuring of a soldier who was lying on a bench covered with a greatcoat.

"I thought and thought," muttered the soldier. "It's easy enough for them mounted fellows. . . . They just sit in their saddles and ride. . . . Higher boys, higher! Drag the net in! Look at the fish! Heaps of 'em! That's right, that's right. . . . They ride. . . . But we have to drag our packs on our backs. . . . Whatever is this, I thinks to myself. It turns out to be a catfish! And what a size! We'll have enough to eat for a week now, Frosyushka! Praise be to God! . . . But as far as I can see, service in the Hussars is hell too! . . . I'd rather carry two packs."

The soldier was delirious.

The blind man heard a low, cautious voice calling from outside.

"Hist! Anybody at home?"

"Come in, come in, Ananich," answered the old man. "My son-in-law will be here soon and bring some friends with him."

The village elder, a pock-marked, swarthy-faced muzhik with a long, broad beard, entered the hut. Making the sign of the cross in front of the icon he turned and gazed at the soldier.

"Is he very bad?" he asked.

"In his last moments, Ananich!" answered the old man. "He'll die before the day's out. I've been whispering charms and praying, but it's had no effect. And it's not surprising. The poor fellow's chest is choked with matter: how can you get it out?"

"Poor Agei Zakharich Svatikov!" said the elder commiseratingly. "He was a brave soldier, was our neighbour! Was—soon he will be no more!"

The scraping of boots and of bast shoes was heard on the porch. The door creaked and three peasants entered. They were the three who were among the crowd in Smolensk welcoming the arrival of the Russian Armies, and the same who had guided the Russian reconnoitring force beyond Katan. One of them, the one in the white trousers, was the owner of the hut.

"Here's a nice how d'ye do!" said the latter, sitting down on the bench near the wounded soldier. "I suppose he'll get them all across today. . . . He seems to be in a great hurry!"

"The main thing is—where the devil is he hurrying to?" interposed the easant in the felt hat.

Svatikov had stopped muttering. He lay absolutely still, except for his fingers, which, with barely perceptible movements, were gathering the edge of the coat which covered him into tiny folds. At the last words uttered by the peasant in the felt hat a heavy rattle came from his throat. He opened his eyes and looked enquiringly at each one in the hut as if surprised at their presence. With great effort he raised his head from his pillow.

"Agei Zakharich! Be a good lad now. Lie still, for Christ's sake!" pleaded one of the peasants.

"Don't stop him, children," interjected the blind man. "He is about to say the most important thing in his life! His time has come. . . ."

Svatikov did, indeed, want to say something, and for several seconds made efforts to do so, but in vain. His thin lips, covered with a dry, white crust, moved slowly, but he uttered no sound. His tense grey eyes became enormously large and shone with a dull, lifeless light. His arms and legs twitched as if in a convulsive effort to help his disobedient tongue. At last, in a muffled and indistinct voice, he asked:

"Where . . . 's . . . the . . . French?"

"Right here!" answered the peasants in chorus. "Pushing across the Dnieper! They've been at it all night. There's no end to them!"

Svatikov shuddered. His pale face, with its sharp nose like that of a corpse, became animated and even seemed to assume a tinge of colour. His voice suddenly became stronger.

"Neighbours!" he exclaimed quite distinctly. "Kinsmen! Why, they are hurrying to Smolensk! . . . They want to capture it! . . . Outflank it! That means, to strike in the rear. Suppose our Prince Peter Ivanovich doesn't know about this! If that's so, it's all up with Smolensk! A-a-ah! . . ."

With that his voice broke and he stopped speaking. He wanted to say something more, but instead of words a hoarse rattle, full of inexpressible despair, came from his throat:

"A-a-ah! . . ."

The peasants stood stock-still, gazing at the dying soldier as if petrified, but their fright and astonishment were of short duration. The first to jump to his feet was the owner of the hut.

"Good God, Agei Zakharich! You are right! You've screwed our heads round the right way! Why, of course! He's hurrying straight to Smolensk! Through Krasny to Smolensk. What's to be done now, eh? Why, it's clear! We must make haste too. The important thing is to inform the Prince."

"That's right!" agreed the second peasant. "Aren't we all serving Russia?"

"Harness the horses, master!" exclaimed the third. "Time flies! Let's be off!"

All three rose, made the sign of the cross and putting on their mittens, made for the door.

"Don't go dashing straight up the hill! Go round and keep your eyes peeled!" warned the village elder, but the peasants did not hear him, they were gone, and again he and the blind man were left alone with the dying soldier.

Agei lay with his head thrown back, his lips now covered with pale pink froth, breathing in a strange and frightful way, not with his chest, but with his stomach, his legs, his entire body, and his fingers convulsively crumpling the coat with which he was covered. The old man went up to the bench, bent over the dying man and listening intently for a moment, enquired:

"Agei, servant of God, are you passing away?"

Svatikov made no reply. He no longer breathed.

* * *

This was the fourth day of the difficult and dangerous march the two Russian Armies were performing. On July 27, after Barclay had stopped the march to Rudnya, had drawn his forces to the right of the enemy and had searched the village of Moshchinki, Bagrattion moved on to Prikaz-Vydra and placing outposts along the line through Leshnya and Katan to the Dnieper, took up positions on exactly the same spot which Barclay had previously occupied. Here the water was indeed bad, but what was worse, Barclay had evidently abandoned the idea of attacking the French at Rudnya. Bagrattion sent him message after message, each more biting and sarcastic than the last. The replies that he received were cold, laconic and enigmatic.

"Right flank. . . . Porechye. . . . Anything you please except fight!" growled Prince Peter Ivanovich, fuming with indignation. "Hanging would be too good for him, Alyosha!"

A protest, an open demonstration, had to be made against this state of affairs. Bagrattion had been leading his army to Smolensk. Barclay had been doing the same. This had seemed to be final, but on July 31 Bagrattion received another order—to return to Rudnya. Yermolov informed him discreetly that the Commander-in-Chief no longer had any apprehensions about his right flank and now desired to act. The First Army started out, reached the village of Shelomets, and there halted. On August 2, the Second Army halted in the village of Nadva. Bagrattion was now absolutely convinced that all Barclay's plans were utterly hopeless. Probably he had no plans at all! The French were active everywhere, and the movements of their Corps were so coordinated that hardly any time would be required for them to combine. And so four precious days had been lost in the most criminal manner. Soon Barclay would not be able to take a step without being cut off from Smolensk. Bagrattion, of course, would be unable to defend the city alone. By a simple diversion in the direction of Dorogobuzh, Napoleon would be able to drive a wedge between the Russian Armies. And in circumstances such as these, wearied by fruitless marching, both armies were standing inactive. A number of units had been out reconnoitring, but nowhere had they spotted the enemy. And yet Barclay had written Bagrattion that he had not abandoned the idea of attacking! In his vexation Prince Peter Ivanovich totally failed to understand what was happening. In fact nobody understood. The officers complained loudly:

"The Devil knows what's happening! Here we are, wandering backwards and forwards, nobody knows what for!"

Never had Barclay been abused so roundly and unanimously, and never had Bagrattion received such hearty support. Suddenly, Barclay arrived in the camp of the Second Army.

* * *

The Second Army had its headquarters in the village of Nadva, around which the troops were encamped. The soldiers had built themselves shacks from freshly cut branches and the vast camp stretching along the high bank of the Dnieper looked like a fresh green wood, beyond which stretched fields of waving, golden corn, intersected by paths radiating in all directions. The setting sun cast deep shadows, but the arms stacked outside the shacks all over the camp still glistened brightly. Infantrymen were hauling bundles of straw and twigs. Here and there strains of song, martial music and the sound of trumpets were heard. The air was slightly tainted with the acrid smoke of bivouac fires which spluttered like fireworks. They were made from the wood of broken cart-wheels, and what wood is drier and burns with a jollier crackle than this well-seasoned lumber!

Lights twinkled everywhere and the murmur of quiet conversation rose and fell like the waves of a distant sea. . . . Suddenly a rocket soared into the sky. Far away a trumpet sounded the melancholy notes of the "Tattoo!" A string of raven and chestnut horses came cantering back to camp from their watering place. Others were tethered to wattle fences, champing their bits and tossing their heads. The drums beat for "prayer parade." The full moon flooded the scene with its pensive light.

Barclay arrived from Rudnya, and Prince Peter Ivanovich treated him to a sumptuous supper in his large leafy shack—hospitality was second nature to Bagrattion. But he had had no sleep for several nights; his face was of a sallow hue, he was shaken by fever, and could scarcely restrain his chattering teeth. After supper the Generals went out on to the green in front of the shack, which was surrounded by a cordon of guards and lit up by a bonfire. Barclay stood in the shadow of the shack, placed his sound arm behind his back and remained motionless. Saint-Priest sat down on a thick tree stump and began to trace heraldic designs on the ground with a twig. Tol, with an independent air, stretched out near the fire and raked the embers with his sword. Bagrattion feverishly paced up and down the green.

"What have you done, Your Excellency?" he said throwing angry glances at Barclay. "It's too awful to think about! Napoleon was in Vitebsk and had no inkling that we were about to launch an attack. His troops were strung out over a distance of two hundred and fifty versts. Prince Eugene was marching to Porechye, and Davout had just left Moghilev. What did we have left against us? Ney, and Murat's twenty thousand in Rudnya. These we should have wiped out! This is not all. We could have cut Napoleon off from his other Corps and beaten them one by one. But what happened? Instead of that, we began manoeuvring—marching round and round on one spot. Perhaps there is some sense in this in theory, but I cannot see any in practice. And what, Your Excellency, are manoeuvres in a war if not . . . idiocy. Everything has gone to blazes! It's maddening!"

"We have given the enemy time to combine his forces, but all is not lost yet," intervened Saint-Priest. "Beyond Rudnya there are only ten regiments of cavalry, ten guns and one regiment of infantry. One of three things: either the French are planning to launch an attack where we least expect it, are playing for time in order to muster all their forces, or else deliberately intend to hold us here until they have smashed up Tormassov's Third Army. In any case, we ought to occupy Orsha and Vitebsk. If we fail to do so, Smolensk will be lost, and we shall have to retreat right up to Moscow. . . ."

"Your advice is belated, Count," interrupted Bagrattion angrily, "and belated advice is bad advice."

He halted in front of Barclay and said:

"Well, Your Excellency! Shall I get a plain and straightforward answer from you, or? . . ."

His eyes flashed so threateningly that Tol became alarmed and rose on his elbow, while Saint-Priest jumped up from the tree stump on which he was sitting and vanished. The cold night air chilled Barclay's bald head. He put on his hat. Then he said in a low, calm voice:

"The French Corps, which Your Excellency and I were to encounter, were stronger than our forces. Success was doubtful; and even if we had been successful, we could not have shaken off the enemy. Failure would have meant disaster."

Bagrattion tore off his sash and threw it into the dying embers of the fire. Tol, with a forced smile on his lips, threw fresh twigs on the fire. A long silence ensued. Suddenly Saint-Priest's loud voice was heard coming from behind the shack:

"Gentlemen! I think everything has been solved!"

He ran on to the green with boyish eagerness, gesticulating so wildly that his golden Adjutant-General's aiguillettes went flying over his right shoulder.

"*J'étais tout à l'heure témoin des sentiments de nos excellents paysans. . . Et ils font preuve dans tout ceci d'une abnégation qui est véritablement admirable. . .*"*

"Speak Russian, Count!" interjected Bagrattion in a fury. "You know I don't understand this lingo!"

Saint-Priest blushed, pulled up suddenly and advancing at a slower pace, said drily and very politely:

"Three peasants from the village of Rossassna have just galloped in with important information for Your Excellency. I've just spoken to them. Napoleon is in Rossassna. His troops have crossed to the left bank of the Dnieper and are marching on Krasny and Smolensk. Moreover, a messenger has just arrived from General Neverovsky. Here is his despatch."

Tol groped round him, but there were no more twigs within reach.

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* I have just witnessed a demonstration of the sentiments of our splendid peasants. The self-sacrifice they display in the present circumstances is truly admirable.

Smiling even more enigmatically than before he slowly unfastened his sash and threw it on the embers. The flames burst forth again. Bagrattion unrolled the despatch and squatted near the fire: his face, lit up by the flames, clearly reflected the changes of his mood. Neverovsky reported that his Division, numbering six thousand men, had been attacked by the Cavalry of Generals Grouchy, Nansouty and Montbrun, behind whom was Ney's Corps. Fighting was proceeding on the Smolensk Road, which was lined by trees four rows deep. This, for the time being, was saving Neverovsky, as the attacking cavalry were compelled to keep to the roadside paths, stumbling over the ditches. But they had already attacked forty times, and their numbers were countless. His Division had already lost one thousand five hundred men and all its guns. His men were still fighting like mortally wounded lions. . . . But. . . .

The dull boom of guns was heard from the left bank of the Dnieper, where the battle was now proceeding. Bagrattion raised his head and listened intently. The thunder of artillery drew nearer and nearer.

"This is exactly what I anticipated," said Barclay slowly. "Had we departed further from Smolensk, it would have been impossible to save Neverovsky."

Bagrattion looked at him with hatred.

"I will rescue Neverovsky!" he said. "We have lost everything except Smolensk. Who will save the city?"

"We must consider whether we ought to save it," replied Barclay. "Napoleon's manoeuvre at Rossassna does not mark the limit of his enterprising nature. He may repeat this manoeuvre by crossing the Dnieper ten versts above Smolensk. In that case, he will be in the rear of both armies. Can we afford to take the risk?"

"We can! We must! Hey! Adjutants!" cried Bagrattion.

Tol had now risen to his feet and was standing near the fire, which was still burning brightly, although he had not added any more fuel.

Bagrattion hastily scribbled an order with a pencil. General Rayevsky's 7th Corps was marching behind the Second Army and was therefore nearer to Smolensk, and, consequently, to where Neverovsky was engaging the enemy. Addressing Olferyev Bagrattion said:

"Alyosha! Explain everything to Nikolai Nikolayevich. Stop the 7th Corps and turn it back. Let it march. . . . No, let it run at breakneck speed through Smolensk to Neverovsky's assistance. That's the first point. The second is—tell him straight from me: we shall not surrender the city without a fight. I have pledged my word to the people of Smolensk on that score, and I shall keep it. The Army will follow on!"

And, indeed, rockets were already flaring over the camp, and at different points the drums were beating the "Alarm." From the Dnieper, sounds as of a thunderstorm were wafted to the camp.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The troops of the Second Army marched towards Smolensk all through the night. Olferyev rode post-haste after them, changing his weary horses in the cavalry units. The morning dawned grey, dull and seemingly dead, but the ground was as green as freshly painted ammunition boxes. Olferyev glanced at the fields and at the long line of infantry marching along the road and thought to himself:

"How great our soldiers are! They carry in their skimpy knapsacks all their necessities, desires, requirements, and even their fantasies, all their human egoism and, in addition, another ten days existence. . . . After that . . . what will be, will be! The greatness of these men lies in that each one carries his future in his knapsack, and this future does not extend beyond the next signal of alarm." These thoughts caused Olferyev's heart to beat with joy and pride. "They regard me as one of themselves. What happiness this is. But am I one of them? What about Muratov?"

He rode on at a rapid canter and the dust from his horse's hoofs rose in a whirling cloud over the soldiers' heads. The peasants came out in crowds to welcome the soldiers, bearing icons, and bread and salt. Mothers carried their infants in their arms. The soldiers, dusty, weary, their faces covered with grimy perspiration called out to them:

"Hey, you women! You haven't forgotten to heat the bathhouse for the Frenchies, have you?"

The women laughed and rocking their crying babies in their arms answered:

"We'll heat it, lads, don't you worry! But you make it hot for those rascals too!"

Olferyev saw and heard this with envy. "In the fire of battle, amidst bloodshed and death for our common Motherland, shall I find friendship and comradeship among these people," he thought. "We are all Russians and, therefore, all kinsmen!" Overtaking a Hussar Regiment he halted to change horses. Suddenly he heard his name called in a deep bass voice:

"Olferyev!"

It was Felich, riding in the rear of his squadron under arrest.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry?" he cried. "Wait a minute. I have a flask of Polish vodka in my holster instead of a pistol. Wouldn't you like to take a drop in a golden goblet? Splendid stuff for a stomach-ache and the shake up of a rough journey!"

Olferyev merely waved his hand and passed on.

"Tell whomever it concerns at General Headquarters that the cavalry have no hay for their horses," came Felich's voice thundering after him. "The Hussars are cutting down the rye, the barley and the grass. The men are taking cereals and rusks from the baggage carts. . . . There are lots of cads and rascals about!"

But by this time Olferyev was far away. Suddenly he started. What's this? Yellow-collared uniforms—the mixed Grenadier Division of the First Army. What's it doing here? He rode up to the men. Ah! So that's what it is! This was the Division which had started out late from Smolensk and had held up Rayevsky's 7th Corps. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good! As was his habit, Prince Karl of Mecklenburg, the Commander of the Division, had overslept and had led the Division out three hours after the appointed time. Slothful by nature, the Prince displayed extraordinary energy only when he yawned. Perhaps he had anticipated Barclay's real plans and this explained why he had not been in a hurry! At all events, he was sprawling in his carriage, red-haired, sleek and fresh, like a young, well-fed bull. He called Olferyev to him and asked:

"What's happened?"

Olferyev told him.

"Humph!" he grunted in reply. "That's very important! Hasten to General Rayevsky and fulfil your mission to the very best of your ability, Mr. Officer. *Sie können gehen!*"*

* * *

The soldiers felt that everything was being done topsy-turvy and that something was happening to them which ought not to happen to Russian soldiers. The "manoeuvres" at Rudnya and the arduous forced marches without any apparent object or reason had a depressing effect upon them. Even Carabineer Tregulyaev's jests had become tinged with bitterness and spleen.

"We either stand about feeding the fleas," he said, "or dash off at breakneck speed. Where to? Nobody knows! Perhaps the devil knows." And he added in a whisper: "That's how our lame devil rushes about. May the Evil One take him! He's worn us all out to a frazzle!"

"Don't blaspheme now," retorted Sergeant Brezgun sternly, and pointing to Starynchuk, who was marching in the front rank, said: "Look at him, brother! It's harder for him than for any one of us, but he's not grumbling!"

Starynchuk marched in the front rank by virtue of his enormous height, but just now his head was bowed by sorrow and he seemed shorter than the men by his side. He was indeed finding it hard. He had longed for battle when the Division had reached Rudnya and had prayed to God to give him the courage to kill a hundred Frenchmen and so earn the St. George's Cross at one stroke! But nothing had happened. Everything had gone on as before. Who was to blame? Starynchuk did not murmur, but the men round him abused Barclay for all they were worth, and he, Starynchuk, felt his heart becoming filled with burning hatred for this lean, bald, lame man with the face of a corpse. Like his former longing for home, his longing to earn the St. George's Cross had become morbid, and every time he heard the Crosses tinkle on Brezgun's chest he started and wanted to groan for sheer anguish.

"But it's just like him!" said Tregulyaev. "By night and by day he does nothing but pray. He would have won that 'Georgie' long ago had it not been for old Blather and Folly . . . because all we're doing is just blather and folly. . . . Oh!

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* You may go!

Barbara, my lady love
Don't be vexed with me.
It's not my fault
That I could not
Keep the tryst with thee."

The Carabineer's Company was marching past a field of tall, ripe peas. Tregulyaev ran his arm along the rows of twining plants so skilfully that his sleeve filled with thick ripe pods as if they had dropped in of their own accord. The peasants who had come out to welcome the troops good-naturedly encouraged the soldiers.

"Take them, take them, lads, take all you want. Don't leave them for the French!"

"Thank you, kind people," answered Tregulyaev. "I wouldn't have dared to touch them without your permission!"

The soldiers laughed. Starynchuk alone remained grave and gloomy.

Colonel Prince Kantakuzen was extremely displeased with the course things were taking. When Polchaninov galloped up to him with the Divisional Commander's orders to turn the Brigade back to Smolensk, he let loose a string of curses and reproaches, directed mainly against Barclay, but partly also against the Prince.

"They'll be the death of us!" he roared. "They'll drive the men to distraction! That's what they want to do, apparently! God sent them as a punishment to us!"

Polchaninov unfolded a map of the environs of Smolensk over Sister's ears. Kantakuzen bent over his saddle, breathing heavily, his face flushed with anger.

"Now, my boy, show me how far we've gone since yesterday," he said.

"According to the map, Your Excellency, we've hardly moved at all," answered Polchaninov. "The scale of this map is fourteen versts to the inch."

Kantakuzen glanced at the Lieutenant feelingly.

"There you are!" he said. "A nice quartermaster officer you are! Hardly moved at all! But we have been moving, haven't we?"

"Yes, we have, Your Excellency!"

"So you agree with me, don't you?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Well, then, show me where we have moved to on the map!"

"According to the map we haven't moved at all!"

Kantakuzen spat in disgust and said:

"Eh, my boy! You're a good hand with the pen, no doubt, but I can't get you to talk sense! Who's this officer galloping up? Why, it looks like Prince Peter Ivanovich's aide! Now we shall learn what it's all about. Hey! Mr. Officer! Mr. Officer!"

But Olferyev had no time to stop and talk. He merely reigned in his horse for a moment and shouted to Kantakuzen:

"The French are advancing on Smolensk! I am riding to inform General Rayevsky. The 7th Corps is being ordered to defend. . . ."

"The 7th Corps!" repeated Prince Grigory Matveyevich. "The 7th Corps! Lucky dogs! And we are out of it again!"

"We are out of it again!"—these words flew round the Brigade like lightning. And when they reached the ears of Starynchuk he clenched his fists so tightly that the very joints cracked.

* * *

The 7th Corps marched to Nadva in the following order: the infantry regiments of the 1st Brigade came first, followed by the ammunition carts and the light artillery companies with spare gun carriages and repair waggons; then came the infantry and light artillery of the 2nd Brigade, followed by the Chasseur regiments of the 3rd Brigade with the heavy battery companies. Lastly came the cavalry and horse artillery.

Starting out late, through the fault of Prince Mecklenburg's Grenadier Division, Rayevsky had barely managed to leave Smolensk when he was overtaken by General Neverovsky's aide-de-camp, who was galloping with all speed to Bagrattion to inform him of the battle the 27th Division was engaged in at Krasny. Nikolai Nikolayevich was an experienced general. Learning what the state of affairs was from the passing aide-de-camp, he at once realized that he would have to defend Smolensk against Napoleon's main forces. He halted his Corps at once. How long he would have to keep the innumerable French forces at bay, he did not know. Both Russian Armies were forty versts from Smolensk, and he could not expect reinforcements before the next night. But his task was not only to hold to this ancient Russian city. His main task was to prevent Napoleon from cutting the Armies of Barclay and Bagrattion off from Moscow. Smolensk was the key to Moscow. By saving Smolensk Rayevsky would save the two Russian Armies and the capital of Russia. The General bared his silver-streaked head to the calm, pale grey morning sky and stroked his luxuriant side whiskers.

"Well," he said, half aloud, "this is something worth dying for!"

The Corps remained stationary for about an hour.

"What are we waiting for, Dad?" Rayevsky's sons asked.

Being slightly deaf, Rayevsky probably did not hear the question. At all events, he remained silent, peering through his spyglass. It was five o'clock in the morning when Olferyev galloped up on a grey foaming horse and, saluting the General, handed him an envelope. "At last!"

"To Your Excellency from Prince Bagrattion, Commander-in-Chief of the Second Army!" said Olferyev.

Nikolai Nikolayevich opened the envelope and extracting a paper from it, brought it close to his short-sighted eyes and read the following lines, written in the hand that was so familiar to him:

"My friend, I am coming at the double quick. Would that I had wings with which to fly to you and reach you sooner! Hold on! May God assist you!"

This was all the message contained, but what else was needed? Rayevsky slipped the paper into the armhole of his white waistcoat. Neither the vastness nor the immense superiority of the enemy's forces daunted him. From behind a nearby hill the rising sun spread a rosy fan of brilliant hue across the sky. Nikolai Nikolayevich embraced Olferyev, and putting an arm round each of his sons he exclaimed:

"Hail glorious day of the Battle of Smolensk!"

The 7th Corps turned about and hurriedly retraced its steps.

* * *

To arrive in time to save Neverovsky, Rayevsky had to pass through Smolensk and, crossing the river by the city bridge, come out on the Krasny Road. On reaching the city, however, he learned from some Cossacks and a wounded trumpeter that the 27th Division had been almost annihilated, and that the remnants of it which had managed to escape the slaughter were hastening to Smolensk. Soon General Neverovsky himself came galloping up. He was a man of robust appearance with a resolute, rather coarse but handsome face, wearing neither hat nor epaulets, which had been swept away by a whirlwind of shrapnel. His coat was dusty and splashed with blood. But neither his face nor his gestures betrayed the slightest sign of agitation.

"Yes," he said, in a calm bass voice. "I have lost my guns . . . and three-fourths of my men . . . but I held those rascals up for a whole day! Russia will never forget me!"

How he had managed to do this, Neverovsky did not say. Evidently, he, too, lacked the gift of the gab. But he had rallied the remnants of his young but gallant Division and had brought them up in good, almost perfect. order. He even succeeded in bringing with him a number of prisoners, among them one of Murat's aides-de-camp.

The French had not yet risen from their bivouac, eight versts from the city. The captive aide-de-camp of the King of Naples stated that Napoleon himself was with the Army, and would certainly attack Smolensk that day to celebrate his birthday. Rayevsky, accompanied by his Staff, together with Generals Paskevich and Neverovsky and their adjutants, inspected the city fortifications. The walls had been built of limestone as far back as the reign of Boris Godunov, and in that period also had been encircled with a dry moat. The walls had a total length of about three and a half miles, were twenty-five feet high, and ten feet thick. These fortifications were supplemented by thirty ancient towers, and situated between the suburbs of Krasny and Mstislavl there was a five-cornered earthwork, which since Polish times had been known as the Royal Bastion. Into the walls were built three gates—the Dnieper Gate on the north, the Nikolsky Gate on the east and the Mstislavsky Gate on the south. From the Royal Bastion both banks of the Dnieper and the bridge which joined them were clearly visible. From this bridge the Great Moscow Road to Vyazma and Mozhaisk commenced.

On the bastion they found a tall, grey-haired General in a white-plumed hat, a cavalry coat and grey breeches. He was standing as stiff and as calm as a statue, a deep frown on his brow, his hands resting on the hilt of his sword. In spite of his stern exterior, his small restless eyes gleamed with pleasure as he greeted General Rayevsky.

"Yes, I am here, in Smolensk, my dear General!" he said, speaking rapidly in French, but clipping his words as Germans usually do. "I am always to be found where danger threatens Russia, but in semi-retirement, with nothing to do. A stop-gap General!"

Rayevsky was very pleased to meet this man. He had not been aware that General of Cavalry Baron Bennigsen, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army in the War of 1807 was in Smolensk. Nobody regarded Bennigsen as possessing great military talent, but opinion was unanimous regarding his merits as an experienced soldier. Nikolai Nikolayevich described the situation to him and asked for his advice. Bennigsen readily responded and proved to be very loquacious.

"Oh, my dear General," he said, "the circumstances are so alarming that I fail to see how I can be of service to you. The dangers which confront you disturb me very much. Advice . . . advice. This is my advice: leave your artillery on the right side of the Dnieper. In this way you will save it from being lost in the scrap at the city walls."

Rayevsky's eyes became stern and piercing as he gazed at Bennigsen with astonishment. He answered the Cavalry General in a muffled voice that seemed to come from afar.

"The advice Your Excellency is giving me is almost suicidal," he said. "Though lacking Your Excellency's experience, I, nevertheless, realize that the issue to be decided today is not one of saving a few guns, but of saving two Russian Armies!"

Bennigsen smiled.

"But without artillery. . . ."

"Yes, I know," interrupted Rayevsky, "without artillery my entire Corps will perish, and I with it. But far better that I should perish than permit the enemy to get into the rear of our armies and cut them off from Moscow. . . . Let me perish, but not the armies, not Moscow, not Russia!"

"Ach!" ejaculated Bennigsen. "How could you so misunderstand the advice I am giving you? Your observations, however, do you honour, General."

While the two Generals were debating, young Alexander Rayevsky was jotting some notes on a sheet of paper, resting it on one of the battlements.

"What is that young officer writing?" enquired Bennigsen.

"He is my son," answered Nikolai Nikolayevich.

Alexander came smartly to attention in front of the Baron and said: "I am recording Your Excellency's conversation with my father."

"What for?"

"For history!"

Bennigsen sighed and said:

"I have heard something about you, Mr. Officer. For history? Probably the kind of history, the consequences of which you have been saved from up to now by the respect Prince Bagrattion entertains for your worthy father."

And turning to General Rayevsky he continued:

"I take the liberty, General, of offering you a further piece of advice although this time unsolicited. Forbid your son to write, and let him talk as little as possible, otherwise his career will come to a sad and sudden end."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The French Army surrounded that part of Smolensk which lay on the left side of the Dnieper, its two flanks abutting on the river. Rayevsky had at his command only twenty-eight battalions, numbering about 15,000 men in all. Both infantry and artillery were inadequate to occupy the whole line of the city's defence and he did not expect speedy reinforcements. He therefore decided to withdraw all his forces to the suburbs and defend the city there. This was an extremely risky move, for in the event of his troops being unable to hold the line, they would be able to retreat only through the fortress gates, which, however, were too narrow to enable them to pass. Retreat, therefore, meant death, but Rayevsky did not think of retreating. In his heart of hearts he relied on the French being unfamiliar with the city and its environs. He was almost convinced that the object of their attack would be to capture the bridge across the Dnieper. That being the case, the main onslaught was to be expected at the Molokhov Gate, in the south, on the right flank of the defending forces. It was here, therefore, on the Royal Bastion, and on the declivities of its counterscarps, between the wall and the moat, that he ordered General Paskevich's 26th Division to take up its position. The surviving Brigade of the 27th Division was posted in the cemetery, in the suburb on the right; in the extreme right suburb another eight battalions were posted. The 12th Division occupied the suburbs on the left. The heavy artillery was placed along the walls and the light artillery distributed among the infantry units. Eighteen guns were hauled to the Royal Bastion, twenty-four were posted in the cemetery, and an equal number in the extreme right suburb.

The French were separated from the city by an extensive plain, which was intersected with ravines, ditches and stretches of water.

"Very convenient!" Rayevsky remarked to Paskevich.

"Very!" agreed the young General.

Although the infantry had their arms stacked, the regiments could send out skirmishers the moment the alarm was given. The guns were loaded and the matches lit. Olferyev galloped to General Headquarters of the Second Army with the report that the city was prepared to meet the assault.

* * *

On the 3rd of August, the eve of Napoleon's birthday, his Marshals agreed among themselves to give the Emperor a birthday surprise. To tell the truth, plots of this kind were hatched every year, and the Emperor had on more than one occasion received evidence of the resourcefulness, ingenuity and enterprise of his "would-be kings." This time, however they planned something really out of the ordinary. As Prince Poniatowski put it to his colleagues:

"This will be a birthday present such as the Emperor has never received before!"

The arrangements they made were as follows: Next day, the 4th of August, when the Marshals were assembled in the Emperor's tent to drink his health, three salvoes were to be fired. This would be the signal to launch the assault on Smolensk. The troops were to fight their way into the city, and Murat, King of Naples, would then present it to the Emperor like a bouquet of rare flowers.

All preparations for this sudden assault had been made right down to the minutest detail. The troops waited impatiently for the dawn and the signal to commence. Early in the morning the Marshals proceeded to Napoleon's tent to offer their official congratulations and waited there while the Emperor was dictating something to his Secretary of State, Count Daru, in the section of the tent apportioned off for his sleeping apartment. At any moment Constant, the chamberlain, was expected to enter at the head of a phalanx of footmen bearing trays loaded with heavy golden goblets filled to the brim with old Arles mead to be handed round to the Marshals. Then the thunder of artillery would be heard, and thousands of brave and devoted soldiers would rush to their death to demonstrate their rejoicing on the Emperor's birthday.

At last Constant appeared, and with him from the sleeping apartment emerged Count Daru, who said:

"Messieurs! His Majesty is extremely displeased with the undertaking with which you propose to mar the solemnity of this day. He forbids it! The Emperor himself will direct the assault on the city!"

* * *

It was seven o'clock in the morning when the Corps commanded by Murat and Ney moved towards Smolensk in three columns. Rayevsky stood on the battery, behind the Molokhov Gate, watching the preparations for the attack through his spyglass. Along the line of the enemy forces, at the head of an enormous suite and an escort of Uhlan Guards in splendid uniforms and tall hats, he saw a short, broad-shouldered horseman galloping on a white steed. The troops seemed to be greatly excited and were shouting something or other. The horseman disappeared from view. The attacking force sent out its markers, and the Musketeers advanced towards the city at a run. Rayevsky was about to order the leading units of the 26th Division to advance too, but Paskevich anticipated him. Several companies of artillery rushed towards the moat, halted and began to pepper the enemy with cannon-balls. This did not stop the French, however. The first column advanced along the river, the second towards the cemetery, and the third made straight for the Royal Bastion. The attacking force had already passed the zone of cannon-ball fire, had charged through the shrapnel zone and had filled the moat, but the infantry of the 26th Division, which was posted between the moat and the city walls, held them there. Rayevsky saw them fire a volley almost point-blank and then lower their muskets and rush into a bayonet charge. This was repeated over and over again. Within two hours the moat was filled with French corpses. The same thing occurred at the cemetery. Everything was going on splendidly. The only disappointing part about it was that there seemed to be no end to it. Attack followed attack. The 26th Division began to show signs of fatigue. Twice already Ney's troops of the line had swept across the moat to the declivities of the counterscarps. True, the men were still using their bayonets with tremendous effect, but it was the artillery which mainly saved the situation. Meanwhile, the French troops kept coming on and on. They hauled scores of batteries into the front line and battered the old, Godunov walls. Whole regiments, deploying in battalions, took up positions in preparation for flank attacks. Rayevsky's face was pallid. . . .

* * *

General Paskevich stood looking down from the breastworks of the Royal Bastion. A hail of lead sent the leaves and branches of the tall willows growing on the bastion flying all round him, but he seemed not to be aware of this. Down below it was worse, much worse, a veritable inferno. Now and again French cannon balls dropped on the side of the moat near the walls, sending up columns of earth, spinning, and whining among the men and laying them out by the dozen. He saw a cannon-ball knock the spokes out of a gun wheel, tear off a horse's leg and lay out two gunners. The gun overturned. Many others were already overturned, and the number of human bodies lying around them was far larger. Terrible as the scene was down below, Paskevich could not help admiring it. His attention was particularly drawn to a tall gunner with broad side whiskers, whose every movement was a marvel of deftness and accuracy.

"Where have I seen him before?" Paskevich asked himself. "Aha! I remember. At Saltanovka, on the outskirts of the wood. An old gun blew up. I threatened to punish the gunner. The audacious artillery lieutenant. . . . How human relationships get mixed up during a war!"

He recalled that while still a page at Court, he had one day heard Count Arakcheyev say: "You must demand the impossible of a soldier to make him do what is possible!" A barely perceptible grimace that might have been a smile flitted across his narrow, handsome face.

"Arakcheyev is a poltroon and a cad, but he's shrewd," he said to himself. "Soldiers may be browbeaten, but it is impossible to fight without them. I promised that gunner with the side whiskers the St. George's Cross and gave it to him. If I am destined to rise to eminence, I will set the world an example of real greatness and wisdom as a military commander."

He continued to gaze intently at the battle raging below.

"What's going on over there?" he suddenly asked himself. Guns were being hauled up and placed so as to fire not across but along the moat. "Have they gone mad? Who's in command?"

It was that very audacious lieutenant whom Paskevich had nearly deprived of his sword at Saltanovka! The French occupied the whole line of the moat. The guns fired. A salvo. . . . Then another. The moat which had just been teeming with men became as still as a grave.

"Good lad, that lieutenant!" ejaculated Paskevich. Then, ignoring the shot and shell flying around him and holding his sword to prevent it from tripping him up, he ran down the bastion as fast as his legs could carry him, into the very inferno in which Travin was operating so effectively.

* * *

Since the beginning of the war Travin had been in a kind of trance from which he was roused now and again only by such absurd incidents as his quarrel with Felich. He felt really alive, vigorous and active only when under fire, facing death. This was the case at the foot of the Royal Bastion. Although under arrest, he was put in command of a company soon after the battle commenced, owing to the heavy casualties among the officers. At first he repulsed attack after attack by frontal fire and across the moat. Soon he realized, however, that with the few guns at his disposal this was not sufficiently effective.

"Would it not be better to fire along the moat?" he asked himself.

He tried it. The effect was disastrous for the French. They fell no longer in scores, but in hundreds! Watching gunner Ugodnikov dexterously handling his guns, Travin thought to himself:

"A smart lad, that! You've only to set his mind working and it goes on and on of its own accord."

Just then Ugodnikov shouted, trying to make his voice heard above the noise of battle:

"Your honour! Suppose we turn two guns to the right and two to the left!"

"A good idea!" answered Travin, and at once ordered two of the guns to be turned. "Limbers off, there! Unlimbe-r-r!" he commanded.

At this moment, Paskevich rose before him.

"Splendid, Lieutenant! Your conduct is admirable!" observed the General.

Travin silently saluted. He disliked Paskevich. "That's the sort that become Arakcheyevs," he had often thought to himself. "But this one would be worse. Arakcheyev was arrogant at Court, but a coward on the battlefield. This one was brave on the battlefield, but would crawl on his belly at Court." And there was something about Travin that the General didn't like. How poorly he is dressed!" he thought to himself. "This is the type that Bonapartes spring from in our queer age."

The moat was again filled with Frenchmen. They were pouring down the slope like a flood, the front lines pushed on by the rear, close upon whose heels came the line battalions at a trot, pressing towards the bastion. In another moment they would fill the moat and flow over against the bastion. Travin stood gazing at this scene as if transfixed.

"Order the guns to fire, Lieutenant!" commanded Paskevich.

"Yes, sir," answered Travin, but he did not move. He knew that the guns were loaded and that the gunners were already holding the matches to the touch-holes; but the gun crews were crowding round the guns to prevent the enemy from seeing where they were trained. He had thought of this trick that morning. Everything was ready, but the enemy was ignorant of what was in store for him. The more they came, the merrier.

"Why don't you obey my orders, Lieutenant," thundered Paskevich. "Are you deaf?"

No more than seventy feet separated the battery from the enemy, and the distance was decreasing every second.

"Lieutenant!" roared Paskevich again.

Travin waved his arm as one does when begging not to be interfered with. His face was deathly pale.

"Lieutenant!" shouted Paskevich, his voice hoarse with fury.

"Just one second, Your Excellency!" he pleaded.

The French were almost on top of the battery. Travin raised his arm and commanded: "Fire!"

The gunners jumped back from the guns. Flashes of flame and clouds of smoke spurted from the muzzles. All the guns roared at once, spitting death, and the teeming mass of men who had only just been running, crawling and pushing forward, Musketeers and infantry of the line, all lay dead. Ugodnikov pointed to where an entire battalion was lying exactly in the order in which it had marched, even with the officers at the head of the squads. The mass which had been pressing on behind stopped dead. Paskevich had never seen such salvoes before. The Lieutenant was certainly a capable, though undisciplined artillery officer. "Your sword!" he wanted to shout to Travin. "Give me your sword! You are under arrest for insubordination!" but to his confusion he noticed that the officer had no sword. Travin noticed the General's embarrassment and at once understood the reason.

"I am already under arrest, Your Excellency," he said.

Paskevich bit his lip in vexation.

* * *

The Dnieper was not wide at Smolensk. Its high right bank could be clearly seen from the fortifications, from the suburbs, and even from the plain on which the battle was raging. At about midday the ridge of this hilly bank bristled with troops. Rayevsky heaved a sigh of relief and inserting his hand in the opening of his waistcoat he made several rapid signs of the cross over his chest. The Second Army had arrived much earlier than he had expected. Bagrattion had indeed come to Smolensk at the double quick march.

Meanwile the French infantry continued rapidly to advance against the city in serried ranks, preceded by their skirmishers. Squadrons of cavalry covered the light artillery batteries on the flanks. The guns roared like thunder, and now and again clouds of thick blue smoke blotted out the scene.

Bagrattion stood on the bank with a number of spyglasses and telescopes mounted on tall tripods posted around him. Peter Ivanovich did not need these instruments, however. His keen eyes clearly saw what was going on in the city and above it, and what he did not see he could easily picture to himself. The burning rays of the sun beat down unmercifully upon him and beads of hot perspiration rolled down his swarthy face. He despatched aides and orderlies to Rayevsky, one after another, and sent him a continuous stream of reinforcements. He had no doubt at all that the battle which the 7th Corps had accepted was only the beginning of a tremendous general engagement for Smolensk. Barclay was a sly fox, but circumstances had outwitted him. Bagrattion looked pleased, even inspired.

Barely had the Second Army bivouacked when, as if by magic, a little to the rear of the spot where the Commander-in-Chief had taken up his post, a number of sutlers appeared with cold water, kvas, beer and fresh cucumbers. The staff officers hastened to the stalls, refreshed themselves, and hurried back. Amidst the motley crowd were peasants dressed in their typical, homespun garb. Among these were the three peasants from Rossassna talking to a Quartermaster-Colonel who, after a lengthy conversation with them, led them straight to the Commander-in-Chief. Prince Peter Ivanovich was in a state of great animation, and so was everything around him. Along the road broken guns and gun carriages were being hauled from Smolensk and fresh artillery companies were hastening to it from the reserves.

The French attack began to reveal marked signs of weakening. At four o'clock in the afternoon Davout started an assault, but was soon repulsed. It was almost dusk when Bagrattion was informed that the vanguard units of the First Army were approaching. General Dokhturov's 6th Corps was already bivouacking. Barclay had led his troops by forced marches in the Suvorov manner, without stopping, the soldiers taking their food as they marched.

"That Quaker knows how to hurry, after all!" thought Prince Peter to himself.

As the first day of the battle of Smolensk drew to a close Bagrattion suddenly exclaimed: "I'm off!" Leaping on his horse he cried: "Out of the way there! Make way, friends!" and galloped in full career down to the river, across the bridge and into the city, with his suite trailing behind him.

The streets of Smolensk were thickly strewn with wounded, the dying and the dead. The inhabitants had taken shelter in barns and cellars. Here and there buildings were on fire and the sky, lit up by the glare of the writhing flames, seemed to be alive. Rayevsky and Paskevich met the Commander-in-Chief at the Royal Bastion. Bagrattion kissed Rayevsky and embraced Paskevich.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart, friends!" he said with fervour. "You have saved the Russian Armies, and Russia. It is too late for you and me, Nikolai Nikolayevich, to start our careers today. We started them in seventeen eighty-eight, under Potemkin, you as an ensign and I as a lieutenant. Perhaps you remember how we became friends. With Ivan Fedorovich, however, it is different. His career starts from today, and it will not be an unimportant one!"

A horseman wearing a General's plumed hat with Stars on his breast emerged from the gloom. It was Barclay. He bowed and, without uttering a word, firmly shook hands with the two defenders of Smolensk.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

During the course of that day Napoleon had several times regretted that he had so haughtily rejected the birthday present his Marshals had prepared for him. The failure of the attack, which he himself was directing, amazed him. By the end of the day he would have two hundred and thirty thousand men at his disposal. This vast army could not fail to take Smolensk tomorrow. But for some reason this thought failed to soothe the Emperor. The sun was already setting when he summoned Junot, Duke d'Abrantes, and said to him:

"Here, Junot! You have become as fat and sluggish as the German oxen you are in command of. At Ostrovna you lost your Marshal's baton, but I still remember what you were in the past. You can find your baton today if you have a mind to."

Junot remained silent. A thousand devils! How sick and tired his soldier's heart was of these reprimands from the lofty height to which he himself had dragged this man! He had been put in command of the Westphalian Corps, a mob of swineherds, as pink-faced as hams, and as fat, and yet he was being told that he had grown fat. Had he been in command of Frenchmen instead of Germans, he would, no doubt, have already conquered not only Smolensk, but the whole of Russia!

"To find your Marshal's baton, Junot," continued the Emperor with a provokingly patronizing smile on his cold face, "you must force the Dnieper above the city and cut off the Russians from Moscow. If you do that, we shall finish this business tomorrow without much effort. Do you understand me, Junot?"

Junot bowed. Of course he understood! Of course he would do it! Was he not to regain his Marshal's baton?

* * *

"Do you see that chimney, Alyosha? Haul the guns in that direction and keep on until you receive orders to halt. See to the posting of the batteries yourself."

Olferyev spent the whole evening posting the guns on the bank of the Dnieper, above the city, and it was nearly midnight before he returned to Headquarters, but Bagrattion immediately sent him off to General of Infantry Dmitri Sergeyevich Dokhturov, the commander of the 6th Corps of the First Army.

The General was indisposed and was lying dressed on a camp-bed in a shack, covered with a black, shaggy Caucasian riding cloak. On hearing Olferyev deliver his message he turned his round face towards him, rubbed his kind brown eyes, and exclaimed:

"What? The 6th Corps is appointed to relieve the 7th?"

Dokhturov sat up on the bed and groaned;

"Sacramento! Good! Very good, young man! Better to die on the field of glory than in bed!"

From here Olferyev galloped to the city and found Rayevsky on the terrace over the Molokhov Gate. Nikolai Nikolayevich was dozing on a carpet. On reading the order that his Corps was to be relieved, he yawned and said to Paskevich who came up just then:

"Thank God, we are being relieved. Do me a favour, Ivan Fedorovich, and show Dokhturov's Quartermaster our positions so that the regiments may leave as soon as the relieving force arrives. See that it is all done before dawn."

The sun was already rising when Olferyev returned to his bivouac after delivering his last message. On the way he overtook a company of light artillery leaving the city after being relieved. All signs showed that it had had a hot time. The guns, from muzzles to touch-holes, were so begrimed with smoke that they had assumed an unusual mottled grey colour; and no less grimy were the men, their greatcoats and pouches, so much so, that they looked like chimney sweeps. As the company ambled along the road officers who had not yet been in action came hastening towards the Lieutenant who was riding at its head, eagerly pelting him with questions. But the Lieutenant replied only in curt monosyllables.

"Where were you posted? On the Royal Bastion?"

"Yes."

"They say it was a regular inferno. Is that right?"

"No."

"Surly bear!" came an indignant voice from the darkness.

But the Lieutenant—it was Travin—paid no attention to this insolence. He was in a strange, elated, but dreamy mood. He saw and heard everything, but it all got mixed up in his head. When the strain of battle had relaxed he suddenly went limp in body and mind. There remained only the proud consciousness that none of those who were questioning him so eagerly could have held the Royal Bastion better than he had done, and their eager curiosity appeared to him to be petty and puerile.

An infantryman stroked a gun-barrel tenderly and said:

"She's been working hard enough, I say! See how mucky she is with dirt and sweat!"

This ingenuous remark drew Travin out of his queer mood in an instant. He bent over his saddle and embraced the soldier.

Olferyev rode by the side of the column, watching Travin. He had seen him only once before, during the scrap at Ciappo's, but he recognized him at once. Everything about that officer, from his proud poverty to the way he embraced the soldier, pleased him. He recalled his own thoughts of that morning. Probably Travin would never be afflicted with such silly doubts, waverings and timid hopes. He shook his reins, rode up to Travin, and, placing his hand on his, said:

"Here, Lieutenant. You scarcely know me, or I—you. I would like something more. Let's be friends!"

Travin showed no sign of surprise. He gently withdrew his hand from Olferyev's and smiling rather coldly, said:

"Don't say that, Cornet. What makes you think I'm your enemy? I don't even regard Baron Felich as an enemy, although he is an utter cad. But let's be friends, by all means!"

Olferyev swayed in his saddle. The blood rushed from his heart and he said in a voice that was barely audible:

"But you withdrew your hand from mine. Why?"

"Oh, no! How can you think so?" replied Travin. "I will tell you candidly, though, I don't like aristocrats. They are not all alike, however. I withdrew my hand for quite another reason."

With that he quickly unwound a dirty pocket handkerchief from his right hand and showed it to Olferyev. Two fingers were missing—the fore and middle fingers. The Cornet caught a glimpse of torn tendons, caked black blood, and the glint of small white bones embedded in the flesh.

"D'you see?" said Travin, in a calm, grave voice. "This is the reason. . . I can't for the life of me see how I shall be able to fight Felich now, either with pistols or with swords. You are more familiar with these things than I am, Cornet. Since we are friends, give me your friendly advice."

* * *

The Westphalian Corps made a detour of Smolensk, moving with the greatest caution. In the first place it was almost quite dark. Secondly, Junot, for some reason, distrusted the three peasants who were acting as his guides. Those clod-hoppers very suspiciously exchanged whispered remarks, glanced at each other significantly and clicked their tongues, and he had the impression that they had no more idea where the river could be forded than he had. Perhaps something worse was in the wind, but he dared not even think of that. Thirdly, and lastly, he had been unlucky right from the beginning of the campaign, especially since he had had dealings with the Westphalians. He never brought his Corps to an appointed place on time, he could not grasp the subtleties of the dispositions, and sometimes he bitterly confessed to himself that he had grown too old for modern warfare, the tactics of which had been devised by his tireless Emperor. The incident with his carriage, which the Russians had so impudently captured from under his very nose at Katan, was significant enough!

And so the Corps moved very slowly, wending its way through numerous orchards and vegetable gardens. Several times Junot bullied the guides, but they bowed very humbly and said something he did not understand, speaking very rapidly and winking to each other the while. One of them, the one in the white trousers who seemed to be their leader, particularly roused his suspicion. Junot heaved a sigh of relief when the moon rose and the Dnieper, at last, glistened like a silver ribbon in the deep black plain. His anxiety returned, however, when Colonel Cléry, his Chief of Staff, riding by his side, said to him in a low voice:

"Your Highness! We have been betrayed! Look where the town is, and where the Russian bivouac! We have moved less than a league from Smolensk, although we have been marching for four hours!"

Before Cléry had finished speaking a cannon shot was fired from the opposite bank, followed by a second, a third, and many more, and so Junot and his Corps were subjected to such a hail of shot and shell that the herd of Westphalians broke into a stampede. The first to vanish was the baggage train, and the whole force was thrown into such confusion that within half an hour the regiments and brigades were as hopelessly mixed up as a pack of cards in the hands of a drunken gambler. Meanwhile the cannonade increased in intensity and the cannon-balls came over thicker and faster, wiping out whole squads at a time. Junot now had not the slightest doubt that the guides had led him right under the fire of the Russian batteries.

* * *

"*Wir bleiben nicht hier!*"* roared the Westphalian soldiers.

Junot galloped among them shouting:

"Soldiers! Look at me! I am covered with wounds. I have fought in Syria, Egypt, all over the world! For twenty years have I served with bravery and devotion! Are you going to spoil my reputation now, you devils?"

"*Wir bleiben nicht hier!*" answered the devils.

"A thousand devils!" roared the Duke. "The Marshal's baton has slipped through my fingers again!"

* * *

The patrols captured the three peasants from Rossassna and brought them to Junot. They no longer glanced and winked at each other. They hung their heads, their faces were deathly pale; but their firm step and calm demeanour showed that they were convinced of the justice of their cause and that death had no terrors for them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The beleaguered city seemed to bloom with hope. Bonaparte did not celebrate his birthday every day! The inhabitants emerged from their shelters. The taverns and restaurants reopened their doors. The "Danzig," Ciappo's and Savva Emelyanov's pastry shop were as crowded as ever. In the streets ice-cream vendors were crying their wares, and the day being very hot, every now and again the officers at the Molokhov Gate sent their orderlies to call them. The men of the 6th Corps who were posted in the suburbs dug up potatoes from the potato fields and roasted them on their campfires. Thus life went on until three o'clock in the afternoon. Shots came from the other side of the moat only at rare intervals. No signs of an impending assault were evident.

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* This is no place for us!

"Napoleon must think that we shall go out of the city and engage in open battle," was the opinion expressed by the officers on the terrace of the Molokhov Gate, where General Dokhturov had established his headquarters. "If he does, he's very much mistaken!"

General Dokhturov had just finished his lunch. His face flushed with fever, he lay down to rest with a leather pillow under his head. Suddenly he remembered something and called to his aide-de-camp.

"That Infantry Lieutenant down there . . . call him!"

A minute later the Lieutenant arrived, pale and agitated. Dokhturov drew a hundred ruble note from his purse and handing it to the Lieutenant said:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, brother! Sacramento! Squandered all your money and then took it into your head to shoot yourself! Fool! Man makes money, not money the man! Take this! Take it, don't be shy! I shall get some more, but whether I shall have another opportunity to help a man—God knows!"

The Lieutenant bowed and muttered some words of thanks, but the General had already turned his back on him, trying to find a comfortable spot on the pillow for his ear. The staff officers found a broken door which they fixed up like an awning over the old General to shield him from the sun.

"Make less noise, gentlemen, make less noise. . . . The General's asleep. Take care you don't wake him!"

But Dokhturov was alseep and not asleep. On the one hand, he heard these whispered admonitions which testified to the touching regard in which he was held—hence he was not asleep. On the other hand, these whispered admonitions soothed him, and he sank into such deep repose that he was incapable not only of rising, but even of keeping his eyes open—consequently, he was sleeping.

At three o'clock the Corps' Chief of Staff arrived from the front line. "The French are showing signs of activity," he said.

Suddenly two rockets rose over the Krasny Road, one after another. The Chief of Staff immediately despatched the officers to their respective units. He expected a battle.

"Should we not wake Dmitri Sergeyevich?" he thought to himself.

In that instant a third rocket was fired, followed by a hail of cannon-balls and grenades, which beat down upon the city. Several cannon-balls struck the terrace. Dokhturov raised his head, looked round in a dazed way, sprang up and shouted: "My horse!"

The French artillery were firing with elevated guns. Close lines of Musketeers hurried to the city walls, charging the batteries. The artillery duel extended down the line and grew in intensity. Ney attacked the Royal Bastion, Poniatowski attacked from the left, while Davout advanced between them. The heads of the French columns drew level with each other, then deployed in perfect formation, and soon the plain before the city became more and more densely filled with long lines of infantry. On the river bank, and in the orchards on the hill, the French were already forcing the Russians back and driving them into the ravine of the Krasny Suburb. Poniatowski reached the city walls and Ney almost reached the Royal Bastion. Meanwhile, Davout was pushing forward to the Rosslavl Suburb.

At the Molokhov Gate the Russian forces were thrown into confusion. The French cannon-balls shattered the battlements of the city walls and the masonry hurtled down on the heads of the Irkutsk Dragoons who were posted below. The Dragoons flinched and retreated to the gates. The infantry at the moat, sensing trouble in their rear, also drew back to the gate, but here they came under the hoofs of the rearing Dragoon horses. A huge Hussar with long moustaches and carrying a Cossack lance pushed his way among the Dragoons shouting:

"Stand fast, you lubbers, or I'll put this through you!"

And suiting the action to his words he did indeed viciously prod the haunches of the Dragoons' horses, driving them forward.

"Why, that's Felich!" exclaimed one of the officers in Dokhturov's suite. "How on earth did he get here?"

A sudden explosion interrupted all further conversation. A grenade burst on the very spot where the Hussar Captain had just been giving vent to his rage. . . . Felich was no more.

Trampling upon the infantry, the Irkutsk Dragoons rushed through the gate. The situation became critical and threatened to have disastrous effect upon the positions at the Dnieper Bridge and the Nikolsky Gate in its vicinity. True. Neverovsky was in command there. . . . Nevertheless, Dokhturov galloped to the spot upon which everything depended. His eyes were bloodshot. He tore his cravat from his neck; hot beads of perspiration trickled down his round cheeks. Breathing heavily, he leapt from his horse, drew his sword and posted himself at the gate under a hail of bullets.

"Your Excellency!" exclaimed the Chief of Staff. "What are you doing? Think of your wife and children!"

"Hold your peace, brother!" hoarsely retorted the General. "Here my honour is my wife and the troops my children!" Turning to the soldiers he exclaimed:

"Sacramento! Brothers! Fate has inscribed on every ball and every bullet the name of the person for whom it is intended! Look! A Dragoon has fallen! He wanted to get away, but was killed! He didn't get away! It's disgraceful for a soldier to run from death, but it is glorious to die when duty calls! Sacramento!"

Never had Dokhturov displayed such eloquence as he did at this critical moment, and it proved to be extremely effective. The Dragoons rallied. The infantry advanced, and their lively, rapid fire, to which was immediately added the grapeshot of the nearest guns, began to pour from two directions upon the French troops of the line who occupied the Krasny Ravine. The space between the moat and the wall was again in Russian hands. The attack on the Molokhov Gate failed. Dokhturov now turned to look in the direction where Neverovsky was fighting.

* * *

Confusion also reigned at the Nikolsky Gate. Here, too, the infantry had retreated and were keeping up musketry fire from the gate. Neverovksy was beside himself with rage. His face crimson with anger, he galloped among the soldiers, swearing and cursing in the most blood-curdling fashion. He seemed to be in holiday attire— he had on new epaulets and beneath his unbuttoned coat a white frilled shirt was visible. His drawn sword flashed in his hand. He was certainly handsome, and his manly beauty and fearlessness had a mighty effect upon the men. The regiments dashed forward and captured the houses in the vicinity of the gate by storm. Neverovsky spotted a short, dark-eyed Artillery General on a black Orel stallion who had halted on his way to turn back a number of infantrymen still suffering from the effects of their fright. What's the meaning of this! Neverovsky dug his spurs into his horse's sides and galloped up to this officer.

"Who are you, interfering in matters that don't concern you?" he demanded.

The little General proudly raised his head and retorted:

"I am Count Kutaissov, commander of the Artillery. My place is everywhere. Who are you?"

"I am Neverovsky!"

The two Generals gazed at each other silently for a moment and rode off in different directions.

* * *

Napoleon ordered his artillery to batter down the Smolensk walls, but the cannon-balls embedded themselves in the masonry and had no apparent effect. He then ordered grenades and incendiary shells to be fired into the city. Smolensk began to blaze. Huge tongues of flame rose to the sky. Curling in the brilliant light of the sun's rays, the black smoke of the conflagration merged with the blue smoke of gunpowder and these grim clouds, pierced by the flames, spread in a lurid glare over the city. Klingfer galloped up to Dokhturov and reported:

"Your Excellency! The Commander-in-Chief has instructed me to say that on your courage depends the preservation of the armies, and even more. . . ."

"Sacramento!" interrupted Dokhturov angrily. "I have never solicited words of gratitude! The only thing I cherish is my honour, which to me is priceless. Besides, what can I do alone? Hasten back, Mr. Officer, and tell Mikhail Bogdanovich that Dokhturov is asking for *secours*!"

Klingfer galloped away. Grenades were bursting in the streets, their splinters hitting the wounded who were crawling along holding on to the walls of the houses. The cannon-balls wrecked roofs and walls, throwing up heaps of debris; they tore up the cobblestones and scattered and set fire to the wooden pavements. Houses were burning and flames belched from the windows, back and front. Buildings caved in with a crash. As Klingfer was making his way through this inferno his hair crackled with the heat and he was bespattered with splintered glass which was falling like rain.

"Suppose I don't get back?" he muttered to himself. "But if I don't they'll get no reinforcements, and without them, they're doomed!"

Further down the road he encountered a gang of soldiers proceeding at the double, holding their muskets tilted before them. No, it was not a mere gang. There were far too many of them for that, and they were led by officers. Klingfer shouted to one of the men:

"What troops are these?"

"Reinforcements from the Commander-in-Chief. Fourth Division. We are making a sortie!" came the reply.

Klingfer breathed a sigh of relief. "Luck is serving under Barclay. . . . What sagacity!"

In that instant something struck the aide-de-camp in the shoulder with such force that not only was he dislodged from the saddle, but he turned a somersault before he reached the ground.

"Won't get back after all," he groaned. "But it doesn't matter now."

Klingfer felt somebody grasp him round waist and heard somebody say:

"Knocked him clean out! Perhaps he will come to! Drag him into the house, boys!"

Then a frightful pain in the shoulder made him gasp. After that all was blank.

* * *

At about five o'clock in the afternoon Davout launched a second assault upon the Molokhov Gate and his troops almost succeeded in forcing their way into the city; but the 4th Division fought with such fury that the French were repulsed again. As on the previous evening, their attacks began to show signs of weakening. The fight still raged. The city was in flames and grenades were bursting over it, but the walls and battlements of the old fortress continued to be lined with Musketeers, and at no point did the French achieve any marked success. They fought on merely for fighting's sake. Guns roared and muskets rattled without interruption, and when dusk began to fall it appeared to those who were watching the battle from the camp of the First Army that Smolensk was girdled with a solid ring of fire.

The loud voice of Prince Peter Ivanovich could be heard coming from Barclay's shack. As usual, the two Commanders-in-Chief were engaged in heated debate. Truth to tell the debate was one-sided; for Barclay scarcely uttered a word. He sat stroking the plume of his hat with his slender fingers, while Bagrattion, backing his words with vigorous gestures, was shouting:

"Fate has torn the laurels of victory out of the enemy's hands! The second day is drawing to a close. Smolensk is ours, and must remain ours! What a head one must have not to understand what is needed! What a heart must one have not to be ashamed of cowardice! Both our Armies have been in Smolensk three times. They were there on the twenty-second, then on the twenty-seventh, and they are there now, for the third time. What for? To leave it tomorrow? The happy beginning of this battle has predetermined its end. General Rayevsky. . . ."

Bagrattion had already remarked on the preceding day how coldly Barclay regarded Rayevsky's brilliant defence of Smolensk. Evidently, in his view the heroism displayed by the 7th Corps was nothing more than the strict performance of its duty. This enraged Prince Peter Ivanovich beyond all measure.

"General Rayevsky has shown what can be done when there is a will to do it. His casualties are enormous? So are Dokhturov's. But I am here! I will lead my Army to the left bank of the Dnieper and bear the consequences. Do you wish me to do that? But you too must. . . . "

Bagrattion drew a long breath and exclaimed: "Why don't you say something! What shall we do tomorrow?"

"We . . . shall . . . retreat," answered Barclay slowly.

These three words, uttered so softly, sounded like an imperative order. In Prince Peter's eyes Barclay's dour features assumed the deathly outlines of an iron mask. He covered his face with both hands to shut out the sight. He would have liked to stop up his ears to prevent himself from hearing, but Barclay continued:

"Napoleon is strong. Neither Rayevsky and Dokhturov, nor you and I can hold the city. Under these circumstances it is my duty to take as my main, my sole rule: not to do what my powerful opponent wishes. He wants a general engagement for the city; I shall not give him that battle. My system of waging war is to annihilate the enemy with his own successes, to compel him to draw away from his bases, to subject him to the severity of the winter, which is not far off."

That morning Barclay had received a letter from the Emperor in which the latter had written: "You have an entirely free hand." The Emperor's intention was, of course, to prod Barclay into resolute action, to induce him to defend Smolensk and to pass to the offensive. This was the only interpretation that could have been placed on these words. But the epistolary rhetoric with which they were clothed obscured this plain meaning. Barclay was to have a free hand. Excellent! But he was of the opinion that an offensive was impossible. He therefore pretended that he regarded the ambiguous sentence as approval of his plan to retreat; and having answered the Emperor in this sense he was not in the least inclined to mince matters in his present interview with Bagrattion.

"Any other system would be fatal," he continued. "Since you cannot grasp the meaning of what I say, Your Excellency, I advise you, in the interest of discipline, simply to obey orders."

Prince Peter Ivanovich quickly walked up to Barclay and took him by the arm. Feeling that Barclay was edging away, he pressed still closer to him. Tears glistened in his eyes, and in a calm, soft, almost cordial voice he said:

"I could grasp it, Mikhail Bogdanovich, if it were like this: we are abandoning Smolensk because it is not prepared for defence, it is difficult to defend, but we have a strong position to retreat to, which Bonaparte must attempt to take. We reach this position, establish ourselves there, and wait to meet Bonaparte. I could understand that. But we have no such position to retreat to. We shall retreat blindly, at random, so to speak, knowing beforehand that we shall seek an absolutely perfect and flawless position and keep on retreating from every position which is not so flawless and perfect. Let us suppose we abandon Smolensk. Who can guarantee that Bonaparte will proceed further after he enters it? Supposing he does not? We shall be in a pretty pickle then! The very thought of it turns me cold. One thing is clear to me: if Smolensk is lost, all is lost." Barclay shook his head.

"After he takes Smolensk, Napoleon will proceed further," he said. "And then nothing will be lost; everything will be saved. Prince!"

A deathly pallor spread over Bagrattion's face.

"And so . . . we shall retreat?"

"Yes."

Bagrattion drew his sword half-way from its scabbard and stood for several moments with his eyes tightly closed. Then, sheathing his sword, he turned on his heel like a top and hurried out of the shack.

"He is mad, stark mad!" thought Barclay to himself.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The Generals of the First Army gathered outside Barclay's shack saw Bagrattion run out, mount his horse and gallop away. Not one of them dared to question him, nor was there any need to do so. Everything was clear. The Generals stood on the ridge of the high bank of the river gazing at the burning city, their features so weirdly lit up by the glare that the most familiar faces became unrecognizable, and so dazzling was the glare that it penetrated their closed eyelids. Count Kutaissov exclaimed in a voice of desperation:

"Three hundred Spartans laid down their lives at Thermopylae, and their fame has lasted over two thousand years! Why then are we. . . ."

He shuddered and stopped speaking. General Tuchkov, the commander of the 3rd Infantry Corps, a man of grave and stubborn character, with a resolute face and thin, angry lips, said:

"High time to put a stop to this, gentlemen! I shall attack Napoleon alone!"

To this Count Osterman-Tolstoi, the commander of the 4th Corps, retorted:

"Why you alone? Prince Peter Ivanovich would willingly undertake to conquer or die. . . . And we are all ready to go under his command."

Yermolov intervened and said:

"First of all, gentlemen, we must know how to attack, and where to launch our attack from." Seeking out Tol with his eyes, he added: "Tell us your opinion, Mr. Quartermaster-General!"

Tol guessed that Yermolov wanted to side-track the discussion and therefore said not what he really thought, but what he expected would rouse doubt and controversy.

"The enemy ought to be attacked in two columns from the city. . . ."

Objections were at once raised from all sides, and the first to protest was General Yermolov.

"How can you, Karl Fedorovich, with your intelligence, give utterance to such an unsound opinion? How will you lead two columns out of those narrow gates?"

"And how will you deploy them at the walls under fire of the enemy's guns?" asked Osterman-Tolstoi heatedly. "Will you manage to bring up the artillery in time? Fiddlesticks!"

"To launch an attack it is necessary to cross to the other side of the Dnieper through the suburbs on the right," said Tuchkov emphatically. "It is still in our hands. We must operate from there."

Tol felt uncomfortable under this combined attack. He no longer smiled, but it was an easy matter for him to turn the conversation against Barclay.

"I had an attack in mind," he said. "As regards defending Smolensk, my opinion is as follows, gentlemen: it should be defended only under one given circumstance. . . ."

"Which?" asked the officers in chorus.

"If the Commander-in-Chief agrees to hurl all his forces against the French But since it is not his intention to do so, no benefit will be derived from defending Smolensk and it is no use holding."

At last Tol was talking sense. It was true. Without unity of action, without a firm hand to guide all operations, an attack was impossible. The Generals glanced at each other in embarrassment.

"What's to be done with the Commander-in-Chief?" they seemed to ask each other.

Kutaissov stepped forward and said:

"*Laissez-moi faire, j'en viendrai à le décider!*"*

"Go, Count," said Tuchkov. "Go and tell him in the name of all the Corps Commanders that we cannot and will not retreat any more!"

"We will not! Tell him that!" shouted all the others.

Kutaissov told the Commander-in-Chief everything he could think of to shake his resolution. The little General spoke in the sharpest, almost provocative terms. His handsome, open face was so flushed and he gesticulated so wildly that Barclay realized that this was a mutiny of his Generals. Things had reached such a pass that the Corps Commanders refused to obey him. . . . And so, he had either to cease to be himself or. . . . He was not angry with the insubordinate Generals, however. He was conscious of that calm toleration with which adults treat good children who, however, have not yet learned that fire burns and that the water of big rivers is deep. He pitied them for their inexperience, and pity is a warm sentiment. To his amazement Kutaissov saw Barclay's pale stern face light up with benevolence, but a moment later the Commander-in-Chief bent over a map lying on the table and the dull flicker of the smoking lamp eclipsed this unexpected internal light.

"I have already issued the order to retreat from the city and to destroy the Dnieper Bridge immediately after, and it must be obeyed," he said. "Let every man do his duty, Count, and I will do mine. This is my answer to Messieurs, the Corps Commanders."

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* Let me go to him, I will make him decide.

With that he bowed in indication to Kutaissov that the interview was at an end.

* * *

"Strike tents! Artillery and baggage—forward! Troops stand to arms!"

Bagrattion shouted these commands as he galloped into the camp. The Generals awaiting his return from the camp of the First Army gasped. Again retreat! The first to recover from his astonishment was Count Mikhail Vorontsov, the commander of the mixed Grenadier Division. His customary, slightly embarrassed smile flitted across his sly, but handsome face.

"Your Excellency," he said, "the Grenadiers have determined not to change their shirts until they go into battle!"

These words, cautious like everything else this General said, were full of meaning, and the other Generals quite understood their significance. They all began to talk at once, interrupting each other. Even Prince Gorchakov, the commander of the 8th Infantry Corps—a nephew of Suvorov's who, unlike his famous uncle was more fond of *leniviye schi*[*] than of anything else in the world—even he rubbed his sleepy, olive black eyes and exclaimed:

"Where are we retreating to? There is no chosen position ahead of us, and no place in which to accept battle!"

Gorchakov was right. Rayevsky made a gesture of disgust. As was always the case with him in moments of keen disappointment, he was now conscious of a feeling of revulsion towards the present and of cold indifference towards the future. The only thing that remained was to regret the past, but the desire to act is not prompted by this melancholy sentiment.

"*Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes!*"[**] he muttered in a weary voice, scanning the Latin verse.

Saint-Priest asked:

"But what's to be done, General?"

Rayevsky shrugged his shoulders. He didn't care. Gorchakov answered the question for him:

"This is what ought to be done," he said. "Prince Peter Ivanovich ought to assemble all the Corps Commanders of both Armies. . . . He is the senior officer. . . . Everybody will obey him. . . . After that, he should dismiss Barclay and proclaim himself Commander-in-Chief."

Indignation with Barclay had become so widespread, and had reached such a pitch, that had this opinion been expressed not by Gorchakov but even by Kuzma Vorozheikin, who, with two other Cossack escorts, was standing nearby holding General Vassilchikov's cavalry cloak, it would probably have met with no objection. To the Generals of the Second Army, the abandonment of Smolensk seemed so utterly shameful that they could not imagine how they could survive such a disgrace. Before their eyes, in bitter reproach, rose the vision of Moscow invested by the French, and behind Moscow was the whole of Russia.

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[*] Soup made from fresh cabbage. Literally, indolent *schi*.

[**] I have done all I could. If anybody can do better, let him.

"Do that, Prince! Take Barclay's place! Without delay! At once!" were the cries that came thundering from all sides.

Bagrattion stood motionless with lowered head, as if petrified in dumb submission. Bagrattion and submission! But beneath this unusually submissive exterior his heart was being torn by a painful dilemma.

"A mutiny of the Generals!" he thought to himself. "And I at the head of it! Well, if the good of Russia demands it, I am ready. Ready to mutiny, and even to lead it. But is it for Russia's good?"

His recent conversation with Barclay had influenced him in a very strange way.Had it not been for that conversation he would have decided without hesitation. Now, however, he felt at a loss. While Barclay was concealing his real intentions and Prince Peter Ivanovich was trying to guess them, amotion governed his reason; his detestation of the "Quaker" obscured everything else. But today, the "Quaker" had expressed himself so fully and so clearly, that Bagrattion's feeling of enmity towards him had almost vanished, and the alarming thought came uppermost in his mind: what if Barclay was right? The militia was far away. God knew what its numbers were. Militia are not seasoned troops. All Russia's hopes were centered on the handful of men mustered near Smolensk. It was not hard to die. But supposing Napoleon crushed this handful tomorrow? Russia would fall ingloriously before him the day after. . . . Bagrattion raised his head, folded his arms across his chest and looking straight at the Generals said:

"I cannot do this, friends!"

* * *

The storm dropped. Flashes of light still flitted among the clouds of gunpowder smoke, but the sound of cannon shots was heard only rarely. The musketry fire too gradually subsided into a faint and distant rattle. The sky over the city was lit up by a brilliant glare, slashed by streaks of flame, which spread like the rays of the rising sun. To the left, windmills were burning. Although enveloped in flames, they continued to turn and their rapidly revolving sails formed crimson circles. To the right, against the dark sky, showers of multi-coloured sparks discharged by rockets were flying among the stars. At midnight General Dokhturov received the order to abandon the city, to retire to the left bank of the Dnieper and blow up the bridge, and temporarily to hold only the Petersburg Suburb, which was occupied by General Konovnitsin's 3rd Division. Just before dawn the 6th Corps was already on the Great Moscow Road.

Simultaneously the Second Army set out on the march. Bagrattion had decided to proceed to Pneva Sloboda, cross the Dnieper there, and then march straight to Dorogobuzh. The infantry plodded on at a slow pace. The artillery barely dragged itself along. The guns were hauled by horses three abreast and the ammunition carts by two, but even then they stuck fast in the mud. Travin's company continued to attract universal attention. The broken wheels, damaged by cannon-balls but still held together by the iron tyres, roused interest and awe. Travin's hand was now properly bandaged, but he had refused to go to the rear among the wounded. Swaying in the saddle on his shaggy pony, he glanced back at Smolensk and thought to himself: "Who can say when the Russian language, Russian songs and the mighty Russian 'Hurrah!' will be heard in this city again? And when, at last, it does ring out over the graves of the fallen, their old bones will shudder." And with that he shuddered himself.

"I am looking for you!" he heard Olferyev say. "I went to the ambulance train to find you!"

"Oh, what a bore this little aristocrat is!" thought Travin to himself, and then added aloud: "What do you want me for? I am not in the mood for philosophical discussions just now!"

But Olferyev did not take offence.

"Listen!" he said. "In the first place, the Commander-in-Chief has ordered that your sword be returned to you. Secondly, Felich has been killed . . . ."

"What?"—exclaimed Travin.

"Yes. He left his regiment this afternoon, galloped to the city, rushed into the scrap at the Molokhov Gate, stabbed and hacked at the retreating Dragoons to rally them and perished himself. What was this man seeking for? What did he want? Thousands of Russians are lying dead in Smolensk and for each of these unknown names there is a heart in our boundless land which will remember it. There the dead will live. The lisping of their children romping in the peasant farmyards, the sad sighs of mothers or sweethearts, the kind words of brothers and friends—all are for him. Sitting at the table they will mention his name and a tear will roll down a rosy cheek or deep and crooked furrow. But Felich? Who will think of him?"

"Och, your honour! How fine you talk!" exclaimed a soldier marching by Olferyev's side. "Nobody could have put it better. It's because life goes on after us that we fellows are unafraid of death!"

It was gunner Ugodnikov. Agitated, his eyes aglow, he had hung on to every word that Olferyev had uttered. Travin heaved a sigh.

"Felich was a queer creature, God rest his soul!" he said. "You spoke of friendship yesterday, Olferyev. If you have not changed your mind, let us conclude a concordat. You're a good fellow: Ugodnikov is a good fellow. It's good to be friends with good fellows. This is what I propose: let us all three be friends!"

Olferyev gazed at him in astonishment and said:

"*Est-il possible que vous faites cette offre sérieusement? A ce qu'il me paraît, vous badinez, mais il n'y a pas à plaisanter la-dessus. Nous sommes des officiers. . .*"*

"Oh, Ugodnikov is only a gunner, is that it? I don't mind that in the least," answered Travin, and then added, guessing Olferyev's thoughts: "But actually I was joking, and perhaps it was out of place. *Il faut garder l'équilibre entre le trop et le trop peu même dans la plaisanterie.*** However, I too have been a Felich, and have always remained one to some extent. Forgive me, Olferyev. Here is my hand in friendship!"

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* Do you mean this seriously? Perhaps you are only joking; if so it is out of place. We are officers.

** One must retain a sense of proportion even in jest.

* * *

Bagrattion rode in the rear of his troops, sad and pensive, surrounded by his silent and gloomy adjutants. Cannon fire was again heard in the Army's rear--the French had resumed their attack on Smolensk and Konovnitsin's Division was fighting the last battle. The firing spread and crept along the river. At last the French batteries thundered on the other side of the Dnieper. The river was narrow at this spot and cannon-balls whirled over the heads of Bagrattion and his suite, but Prince Peter Ivanovich did not even notice them. Olferyev came galloping towards the Generals.

"Go to the Prince!" they whispered to him as he reached them. "Go to the Prince! He has been asking for you."

The Cornet rode up to the Commander-in-Chief. The latter's face looked so sad that Olferyev's heart was touched.

"What are we doing, Alyosha?" the Commander-in-Chief asked in a voice filled with anguish.

"I am ashamed . . . ashamed, Your Excellency!" answered Olferyev fervently. "We transformed Smolensk into a den of horror, death and disaster, and are now retreating. . . . Where to?"

"Where to?" echoed the Prince.

"Into the gloom of this accursed night through which we are now wandering. . . ."

Olferyev wanted to say much more, but his horse suddenly swerved. A blast of cold air struck the Cornet's face and something whizzed past his head with a deafening shriek. He could barely keep in his saddle.

"I'm wounded!" was the thought that flashed through his mind.

He wanted to utter these words aloud, but instead, he fell back and groaned.

* * *

The narrow and crooked streets of Smolensk were ablaze. The wooden pavements were smouldering, giving off an acrid smoke. Gusts of whirling wind blew up spouts of embers and hot ashes. At one of the batteries in the Petersburg Suburb, where fighting was still going on, stood the Cesarevitch, Constantine Pavlovich, and General Yermolov. Drawn up to his full height, his coat unbuttoned, his arm extended towards the city, he presented a picture of statuesque beauty. In a slightly trembling voice he declaimed:

Who into the vortex has plunged our land?
Called down Heaven's avenging hand?
Who stands to gain by the foe's machinations,
War, and devastating conflagrations?

The Cesarevitch's eyes flashed angrily under his straw-coloured brows.

"Barclay, my dear friend!" he answered in his husky voice. "That damned Chaldean. And now he does not want me to serve with you. He is driving me from the Army! The thought of my sharing danger and glory with you is like a knife in his bosom! Canaille!"

They left the battery as they talked and were now walking through the streets of the suburb. The warehouses formerly used for storing hemp and flax were now filled with wounded. Outside these premises there were pools of crimson water, which the surgeons' assistants had poured out after bathing the men's wounds. The air was rent by shrieks and groans. The Cesarevitch and Yermolov stepped into one of these improvised field hospitals and a frightful scene met their gaze. Wounded men were sitting, lying and standing, and surgeons in white aprons, their sleeves rolled above their elbows, bustled among them, operating like butchers in a slaughter house. The air was so saturated with heavy and stifling vapours that the Cesarevitch at once skipped back into the street.

"It's all Barclay's fault!" he hissed, panting with indignation. "Russia's curse! But I will teach that Chaldean a lesson yet! We shall not part so peacefully!"

Suddenly he began to limp, in imitation of Barclay; and indeed, at that moment, he seemed to resemble him in some way. Yermolov laughed.

* * *

The French forded the river to the left of the burning bridge, and threading their way through vegetable gardens, hemp fields and orchards, they advanced to the cemetery. The Chasseur Regiments of General Konovnitsin's 3rd Division were concealed in the cemetery buildings. The commander of the Division, a lean, dishevelled man with a sallow, tired face and large clear eyes directed their fire in person.

"Now lads," he said, running from one group to another, "see that every bullet finds its billet. Don't waste a shot!"

The Chasseurs punished the French cruelly with their well-aimed fire, but grenades were already bursting over the cemetery buildings and their dry wooden roofs and walls were beginning to burn. Konovnitsin then led the men into the open and shouting: "Bayonets! Charge!" he ran on in front, waving his sword. A short sharp fight ensued. Before the first streaks of dawn appeared not only the cemetery, but the whole of the Petersburg Suburb was cleared of the enemy.

This battle could not have altered the fate of Smolensk, but it had to be fought to enable the First Army to proceed unmolested along the left bank of the Dnieper, up the hill, beyond the Petersburg bar, and from there to the plain below. The Army retreated slowly. In the darkness the officers could be heard swearing in their vain efforts to line the columns up properly. Polchaninov too galloped back and forth on his Sister, swearing like the rest, urging the infantry to keep in line and the artillery drivers to pull evenly and smoothly. Suddenly the Grenadiers found their progress blocked by a long train of britzskas and tarantasses loaded with household goods and creaking peasant carts on which women were trying to soothe their wailing infants while their menfolk walked dejectedly by the side of their lean and scraggy horses. Behind followed a procession of nondescript pedestrians carrying knapsacks and satchels.

Polchaninov's heart sank at the sight. He stopped shouting and his body seemed to sag. These were fugitives from Smolensk and the surrounding villages. Usually, troops on a difficult march are impatient when obstacles of this kind arise in their way, but it was not the case this time. Without a word of command they opened their ranks, leaving a lane for the sad procession to pass. Even the artillery swerved to the roadside and the gunners helped the peasants to haul out carts which had stuck in the mud. The Army sympathized with the people in their distress.

"He's driving all Russia from her home!" exclaimed Tregulyaev. "See what he's doing! Once you let a beetle creep into your cabbage patch you can say good-bye to your cabbage! Ekh! May the Devil choke him!"

"A joke's a joke, brother, but don't put evil thoughts in people's heads!" retorted old Sergeant Brezgun admonishingly; but he was not as stern and emphatic as he usually was. He, too, was disgusted with what was going on. And besides, Tregulyaev was not joking at all. Starynchuk heard all this and took it strongly to heart.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Beyond Smolensk lay Russia—the broad expanse of black earth country, boundless seas of waving, golden corn checkered with brown patches of newly ploughed fields, birch woods on the horizon, and the double row of willows, dishevelled by winter storms, lining the highroads. It was very hot, windy and dusty. Both men and horses were tortured by thirst. The horses eagerly stretched their muzzles to the streams that were met with on the way, but they could not drink with their bits in their mouths, and this drove them frantic. The men carried their shakos under their arms and covered their heads with handkerchiefs or tree leaves. The eyes of many of them were inflamed and watery, the effect of the smoke from the bivouac fires and of the whirling dust.

The troops were almost exhausted. The infantrymen slept on the march under the shrill strains of fife and drum and collided with each other, causing confusion in the ranks. The cavalrymen dozed in their saddles. And all this was due not so much to the long marches as to the frequent halts, which are inevitable when a large body of troops is moving along a single road. The men's uniforms were worn to shreds. Instead of the regulation pantaloons many of them wore motley, roughly patched trousers, God knows where obtained. Their belts and pouches had not been pipe-clayed for ever so long and were now of a dirty yellow hue. But nobody paid any attention to this. The only thing that mattered was to keep the arms in good condition, and this was seen to by everybody, from the General down to the lowest waggon driver. Behind the Army trailed thousands of provision carts and ambulance carts carrying the wounded.

The nearby roar of artillery is exhilarating, its distant rumble is depressing. The spirit of the troops was at low ebb. Several soldiers dropped out to look at a mile-post and read out aloud:

"Moscow—three hundred and ten versts."

This was caught up by others, passed on from line to line and soon was carried to all the regiments, divisions and corps. Dorogobuzh, Vyazma—

ancient Russian place names, the very sound of which gripped the men's hearts.

"Vyazma town—of Moscow town the gate."

In every company, in every squadron, weary men, their lips parched and grey from dust and heat, were heard to mutter the words, so sinister in their vague significance:

"Russians aren't crabs—they don't like to crawl backwards! 'He' is up to some devilment 'he' is!"

* * *

"Halt!" In an instant the cauldrons were up, the cooks running for water and the butchers leading cattle to be slaughtered for the pot. The soldiers pulled down derelict barns, threshing sheds and fences, for what kind of a bivouac is it without firewood, straw and fence poles? The poles tied with wisps of straw were used as supports for the cauldrons. The cavalrymen tethered their horses without, however, removing the saddles. They merely loosened the girths, unfastened the bits and slung nose-bags filled with hay to the horses' heads. Within half an hour the bivouac was ready. Men were sitting round the fires munching their food and conversing. But no matter what the conversation started with, it inevitably turned to "him."

"Wonderful life this!" exclaimed the irrepressible Tregulyaev. "Belly for a bed; back for a blanket; fist for a pillow, what else needs a fellow? If your pillow's too high, take two fingers away. D'ye hear that, Vlas? (this to Starynchuk), learn it well, brother!"

Turning to Sergeant Brezgun he said:

"It looks to me, Ivan Ivanovich, as though we have only one more march to perform now; to the bridge . . . and into the water! What do you think?"

Brezgun stroked his whiskers. He understood what Tregulyaev was driving at and answered to the point:

"Who can tell? Perhaps it's all because 'he' is so crafty. He may have something up his sleeve. 'He' has a head on him, you can't deny that!"

"But what's the use of a head without sense, Ivan Ivanovich?" retorted Tregulyaev. "And where's 'his' sense if 'he' has brought Vlas to such a state that he wants to tear him to pieces? And he's brought everybody to this state. 'He' thinks with his backside, not with his head. You can't make a hunchback stand straight against the wall. 'He' is crooked. 'He' is a snake with his coils round Russia. The old folks are right when they say that you can't tell an enemy until you have given him food and drink. A nice Commander-in-Chief we're blessed with, to be sure!"

Before Rudnya and Smolensk, Brezgun would not have tolerated language of this sort, but now he sat silent, with his head down. Tregulyaev waved his hand in disgust, wiped his mouth and rose. Glancing round he noticed the Carabineers of the other squads gathering round something in a nearby field. He guessed that they had discovered a pit in which the peasants had buried their potatoes before making for the forest to escape the French.

A fairly large crowd of men were already bustling round their treasure trove. Some were digging the potatoes and shovelling them into the skirts of the other men's greatcoats. Tregulyaev ran up to the pit and took his place in the line; but he found waiting a tedious job, and besides, he feared that there would be no potatoes left by the time his turn came, so he shouted at the top of his voice:

"The Prince! The Prince is coming!"

In the First Army, "Prince" meant the Cesarevitch, who was very stern in matters concerning the maintenance of good order in the ranks and punished infractions very severely. On hearing Tregulyaev shout, the soldiers took to their heels. This was exactly what Tregulyaev wanted. The pit now lay open before him with a heap of temptingly pink potatoes lying at the bottom. He unhurriedly slipped into the pit and began to fill the pockets and skirt of his greatcoat.

"Stand and don't totter, walk and don't stagger, talk and don't stammer, tell fibs within measure," he muttered to himself gleefully as he gathered up the spuds.

But his bliss was disturbed in the most sudden and surprising manner. Now he heard the cry:

"The Prince. The Prince is coming!"

Convinced that somebody was trying to fool him as he had fooled the others, he slowly raised his head and to his astonishment, he actually did see the Cesarevitch Constantine Pavlovich, mounted on a roan horse and accompanied by a small suite, making for the spot where the Carabineer's Company was bivouacked. The Prince rode close by the spot where Tregulyaev was standing stiff at attention, but he did not even glance at the pit or at the soldier. Meanwhile, the Prince's approach was observed by the Company. The men lined up in squads and loud commands reached Tregulyaev's ears. He jumped out of the pit, and sticking the corners of his heavily laden greatcoat under his belt, ran to his post as fast as his legs could carry him.

The Cesarevitch greeted the men gloomily and slowly rode down the line. Unconsciously, he tugged at the reins in his left hand rather severely and his tall roan bared its teeth and with white foam dripping from its mouth, made a vicious snap at its rider's leg. Drawing rein, the Prince sat in the saddle silent and pensive for a while and at last said in a husky voice:

"A bad state of affairs, friends, but what can be done about it? We are not to blame. . . . It's painful, very painful, enough to make one weep . . . but we must obey those in command over us. . . . My heart is breaking no less than yours. . . . No good will come of it. . . . Old messmates! 'His' heart is not ours. . . . That's the trouble! But what can we do?"

He continued in the same strain for a long time and then, with a curt nod, and frowning still more heavily, he turned his horse abruptly and rode off. All the time the Prince was speaking Starynchuk stood as stiff as a post, and he remained thus standing after the Prince had gone. His face was deathly pale. He trembled at the knees; he felt his anger rising and choking him.

"So the thing he hated Barclay for was all true," he reflected. "It was not mere soldiers' talk. It must be true since the Tsar's brother said so. . . ."

He looked round and saw other faces, pale and distorted with anger like his own. The potatoes had dribbled out of Tregulyaev's greatcoat long ago, but the latter had not noticed it. Somebody's musket fell to the ground with a crash. A loud sob was heard. . . .

* * *

The ambulance carts were halted in a dark wood, on a narrow dirty track filled with puddles, near a wooden fence which surrounded an ancient monastery. In the little wooden chapel the monks were performing the last rites for a General and several staff officers who had just died of their wounds. The sextons, assisted by the ambulance drivers, were hastily digging graves, large pits capable of holding twenty to thirty bodies. Others were removing the dead from the carts to make room for the wounded who were still alive. Groans, shrieks, prayers and curses rent the air. From the low refectory a couple of monks carried a cauldron filled with steaming buckwheat suspended from a pole resting on their shoulders. The slightly wounded officers were gathered round the chapel, engaged in animated conversation. A lanky Infantry Lieutenant, his eyes blazing with anger, was saying:

"What do you make of it all, gentlemen? First we wandered aimlessly round Smolensk, almost giving it up without a fight. Then, as if for a lark, they send only our Corps to defend it, while all the other troops look on from the hills like the audience at the Italian opera! After heavy fighting we repulse the attack. . . . And then we abandon Smolensk altogether! What do you make of it all, gentlemen, I ask you? And we were to have retreated along the St. Petersburg Road! . . . It's a miracle we did not lose the Army!"

"A rotten business!" exclaimed a shrill-voiced, rosy-cheeked Artillery Ensign. "The Russians are a brave and noble people, born to fight in the open and not to pursue silly tactics!"

"I ask you, what does it all mean?" the lanky Lieutenant enquired again.

"No need to ask," answered a red-haired Captain of Dragoons in a confident bass voice. "We have been betrayed to the enemy! Treachery, Sir! That's what it means!"

Olferyev had received a heavy blow in the hip from a cannon-ball and his side was severely bruised and swollen. The surgeons looked anxiously at the livid weals that covered his body for the sinister signs of gangrene. Pain and fever had greatly weakened him, and now and again he fell unconscious and delirious. Happily, his close association with Bagrattion and the latter's concern saved him from many of the inconveniences that other wounded officers suffered. He was not carried in an ordinary ambulance cart filled with wounded and men who had died on the way, but in a tarantass, which, though open, was capacious, empty and comfortable. His old man-servant Nikanor sat on the box by the side of the driver, weeping all the time. In his delirium Olferyev imagined that he was in a large, smoke-begrimed bathhouse of the type to be found in provincial towns for the common people. It was frightfully hot and Olferyev felt stifled with the heat. From the ceiling, like flitches of bacon, were suspended the dry and brown bodies of human beings with eyes bulging with pain and fear. They were being smoked for Easter. And Olferyev knew that he too would soon be suspended in the same way. The only reason why this had not happened already was that they were waiting for another arrival. "Who can it be?" he asked Travin. "Oh, another aristocrat—von Klingfer," answered Travin. In that instant Klingfer appeared looking pale and thin, and supported by two hospital attendants. A bloodstained splint protruded from his bandaged right shoulder.

"Put this officer in here," said a surgeon with the ribbon of the Order of Anna on his breast to the attendants. "This carriage is quite big. . . . Careful now, you devils! Two is always good company, and conduces to a speedy recovery!"

Olferyev wanted to object, but he could find neither the words nor the strength to do so. Klingfer struggled to get away from the tarantass, but he was picked up in the brawny arms of the attendants and placed beside Olferyev.

"That's splendid!" said the surgeon. "Salfet,* your honour!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Colonel Tol had scarcely left his saddle from the moment the retreat from Smolensk began. The awkward position he found himself in had not in the least diminished his energy. On the contrary, it was in seething activity that he sought a balm for this troubled mind and confidence in the future. Tol rode a very small, long-tailed, light grey ambler, which no quartermaster officer, even when mounted on the finest thoroughbred, could keep pace with. On this horse the Colonel rode no less than a hundred versts every day, searching for a convenient position for a general engagement. And so he rode with the other quartermasters trailing in his rear.

The Colonel was perfectly well aware that all these explorations were utterly useless, as Barclay was still determined to avoid giving Napoleon battle. The Commander-in-Chief had ordered Tol to find a natural position on the line of retreat only in order to create the impression that he desired to offer the enemy determined resistance, and Tol fostered this impression of resolute activity which the Commander-in-Chief required with amazing zeal. By doing so, however, although not deceived himself, he seemed to place himself on a par with those who were. He too was a victim of Barclay's duplicity, and thus, as it were, dissociated him from the Commander-in-Chief and gave him the right to abuse him as the others did. It was these important considerations that prompted his tireless activity. The armies arrived at the positions he chose, halted there for several hours, and then proceeded further. Tol's fruitless energy wearied his subordinates, but he was ruthless and exacting, and he brooked no denial. Sometimes he would say with a subtle smile:

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* Bad Latin for *Salve*—safe journey.

"No need for you on our faults to dwell,
Alas, we know them all too well!"

He was fond of quoting Russian proverbs, and always did so aptly and to the point; but in throwing this stone at Barclay he thought to himself: "*Das ist ein verfluchtes Land, da ist nichts anzufangen.*"*

Near Dorogobuzh a rare thing happened. The energetic Colonel was actually resting in his shack, on a camp bed made of rough planks. His coat was unbuttoned, and he was smoking a long pipe with evident enjoyment. His repose was rudely interrupted, however, by the intrusion of Count Leiming, Barclay's ape-like aide-de-camp.

"I am so glad I have found you in," he said walking into the shack. "And very glad, too, to have found you alone!"

This prelude, and Leiming's mysterious air, roused Tol's curiosity, but he made an effort to answer in the most indifferent tone he could command.

"Oh, come in, my dear Count!" he replied. "It is doubly boring to try to kill one's boredom alone. Only egoists can think otherwise."

"How clever he is!" thought Leiming to himself, and then said aloud with a still more mysterious air:

"I have come to share some extremely important news with you. I don't think I can find a better confidant. In payment for my candour I want advice!"

The Count looked round furtively and continued:

"This news has put me in a quandary. If I were in St. Petersburg I would know what to do, but here. . . ."

"Two heads are better than one," interjected Tol.

"Quite true!" answered the Count. "Moreover, we are both in the same boat. *Vous êtes obligé de m'empêcher de faire une bêtise.*** Both of us enjoy the gracious attention of our worthy General, Barclay de Tolly. . . ."

The Colonel was getting an inkling of what was in the wind.

"It seems to me," he said, blowing perfect rings of tobacco smoke, "that while I, by his orders, am looking for positions for the Army, he has entirely lost his own position."

"How clever he is," thought Leiming again, and swiftly drawing a letter from the inside of his coat he said: "Listen!"

Tol closed his eyes. The German phrases in which the letter was couched rang pleasantly in his ears. Leiming's uncle in St. Petersburg, the tutor to the young Grand Dukes, was closely connected with the Court, had weight and influence there and the opportunity of obtaining first-hand information about affairs of state. He had taken advantage of a trustworthy means of informing his nephew, in this letter, of matters of cardinal importance. It appeared that Barclay had been dismissed and that one-eyed Golenishchev-Kutuzov had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the Russian

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* This is an accursed country. One cannot do anything here.

** You must save me from committing a blunder.

Armies. This had not passed off smoothly, the letter stated. The details were as follows: the matter had been decided by a committee consisting of the six highest dignitaries of the Empire. None of them had questioned the necessity of removing Barclay, but they differed very strongly among each other as to who was the most suitable candidate for the post of Commander-in-Chief. The names of Bagrattion, Bennigsen and Tormassov were mentioned, but finally they agreed on Kutuzov. This unanimous decision was very displeasing to the Emperor. He did not want Kutuzov. On signing the order he metaphorically "washed his hands" as Pontius Pilate had done in his day. This magnificent Emperor went even further in his self-abnegation: he gave the new Commander-in-Chief an entirely free hand and waived his unquestionable prerogative to veto his commands. On these terms Kutuzov accepted the appointment and was now on the way to meet the Army.

After reading all this Leiming carefully folded the letter and glanced at Tol. The Colonel looked so pleased, and such a blissful smile flitted about his lips, that the Count was astonished.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Are you not disturbed by the prospect of losing our worthy Barclay? I don't know Kutuzov, but I know he will not be a second Barclay to me. I want to apply for a post in the fighting forces. For God's sake, advise me what to do!"

"Humph!" grunted Tol. "The fighting forces undoubtedly need capable officers like yourself, Count. As for me, my position is entirely different from yours. Kutuzov will not be a second Barclay to me either, but he will be Kutuzov, and that's good enough for me. I was a Cadet at the Infantry Corps when he was the chief of that establishment, and he loved me like a father. But why are we discussing his appointment solely from the point of view of our private affairs? What about the Army? What about Russia? Within a month we find ourselves beyond Smolensk. What's to prevent the enemy from covering the three hundred versts to Moscow in ten days while the Commanders-in-Chief are arguing and exchanging correspondence about Porechye and Mstislavl? Kutuzov will not have to argue and engage in correspondence. True, he is well on in years. Well, we shall try to galvanize him out of his senility. . . . We have no lack of energy. Blunders and censure we shall leave to him—he, with his fame, can stand it—success and praise we shall rightly take for ourselves. The Army has known Tol as a Colonel—in gorgeous epaulets he will be the hero of all Russia! We shall break down resistance wherever we encounter it! We shall clip Bagrattion's wings and dock Yermolov's tail!"

Tol had risen to his feet and was standing in the middle of the shack agitated, pleased, radiating health and vigour. Extending his hand in which he held his pipe with the stem broken in half, he exclaimed:

"*Das ist ein schönes Land, da ist alles anzufangen*!"* and he gave vent to a loud and squeaky laugh.

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* This is a splendid country! One can do anything here!

* * *

Near the village of Fedorovka, close to Dorogobuzh, a position was at last found which was quite suitable for a general engagement. At all events this was how the Quartermaster-General described it to Barclay.

"*Das ist eine starke Position!*"* he said.

Actually, however, the position had so many serious drawbacks that it was neither strong, nor fit for a general engagement. Tol was aware of this, but he was quite convinced that Barclay, having consistently evaded battle up to now, was least of all inclined to fight on the eve of his dismissal, of which, no doubt, he had already been informed. Consequently, he thought, this slight subterfuge could do no harm. He had been ordered to find a position and he had found one. It had to be a strong position? Well, "*das ist eine starke Position!*" That was how Tol reasoned.

But Barclay reasoned quite differently. He had been, indeed, already informed of Kutuzov's appointment, and the expected arrival of the new Commander-in-Chief would bring to a close a definite stage of the great war that would be associated with his name. For him it had been a period of bitterness and vexation. The hatred of the troops offended, depressed and pained him beyond degree. Thirty years of comradeship-in-arms with Russian soldiers were gone for nothing, and the only reward he had received for his loyalty and devotion were slander and public contumely. He had been unable to alter the situation; but now that the new Commander-in-Chief was on the way to join the Army, and he, Barclay, would be in command only a few days longer, the opportunity to do so occurred. He was able, at last, to do what both the Army and the people so passionately desired. In these last days he was prepared to encounter Napoleon. If success was achieved—another would lead the troops to fresh victories. If defeat was met with—it would not be he who would rally and strengthen the defeated forces. He had to decide to give battle in order that his name might not be forever associated only with retreating, manoeuvres, prudence and caution. He wanted to justify himself in the eyes of the armies before leaving them. The only way to do this was to enter into a general engagement.

"*Eine starke Position!*" Tol had said.

"Show me this position, Karl Fedorovich," said Barclay. "I will go with Prince Bagrattion to inspect it."

Barclay never requested, he commanded: but his commands always sounded like requests, and with Tol he was never peremptory. But this only served to fan the Colonel's vanity and to give wings to his ambitions. He bowed with a cold smile.

On the tenth of August the two Commanders-in-Chief and the Cesarevitch, accompanied by their Staffs and suites, went out to examine the position. Mounted on the grey ambler and slightly swaying in the saddle, Tol rode in front and pointed to the various features of the terrain. As he spoke he turned his broad shoulders to the right and left, thus shutting out the view of the spots he was pointing to, but he did not appear to be conscious of this. Several times Bagrattion struck the grey horse on the haunch with his riding whip, and each time Tol looked round, raised two fingers to his hat in salute, but obscured the view again. Prince Peter Ivanovich had long entertained a dislike for this cocksure and presumptuous person. He found much that was repulsive even in his appearance—his sleek, smug freshness, his eternal, slightly supercilious smile, and his curt, gruff voice.

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* It is a strong position.

"Nice times these, Your Highness," Prince Peter whispered to the Cesarevitch. "It's the insolent rogues that get to the top!"

The Cesarevitch glanced at Tol and nodded agreement.

"But Karl Fedorovich, this is not a strong position at all," observed Barclay. "The ridge on the right flank runs parallel with the extension of our first line. That means that the French can keep our entire front under fire."

"We can build a redoubt on the hill, Your Excellency, and this drawback will be removed," answered Tol.

"Yes, we can build a redoubt, but that lake, over there, will make it difficult to hold. We would at once have to despatch large numbers of infantry and artillery there, and, consequently, keep them out of the general engagement. But suppose they are dislodged? There is no safe line for them to retreat to!"

This was the last thing Tol had expected. Barclay was criticizing the position in the detailed and thorough manner that he alone was capable of doing. The Quartermaster-General blushed with vexation. In the first place, he did not see the sense of this carping criticism. Secondly, it irreparably damaged his reputation as the most educated and capable staff officer in the Army. And this only a few days before the arrival of the new Commander-in-Chief! Probably Barclay did not suspect that he, Tol, was already aware of his dismissal. This absurd and extremely awkward situation must be remedied at once. Barclay must be pulled up and made to understand that his criticism was belated and superfluous. Tol bent over and fingered the straps of his horse's bridle and in a tone of undisguised hauteur and insolence he said:

"A better position could not be found, Your Excellency. I don't know what you want. I chose the position, hence it cannot have the drawbacks you refer to," and he laid special emphasis on the "I."

Bagrattion had listened closely to the conversation between the Commander-in-Chief and his, Quartermaster-General. Barclay was right. The position was worthless. Prince Peter vividly pictured to himself the absurd blunders that would inevitably be committed in the course of the battle if the Army occupied it. How much sacrifice, blood and suffering, and lost chances of success this would involve! Honour to Barclay for having perceived the blunder his favourite had committed and for not attempting to conceal it as was his wont to do. The Army could not give the French battle here. Barclay was, shrewd! But Tol—what sort of a bird was he? And how quickly he passed from humility to unprecedented insolence in defending himself! Was that fortuitous? Of course not! He had sensed what was in the wind and had become presumptuous. This touched Bagrattion to the quick, and his wrath burst out like a flash af ignited gunpowder.

He dug his spurs into his horse with such force that it leapt forward, swerved and collided with the Quartermaster-General's horse.

"How dare you talk like that, Colonel!" he demanded in a white heat of passion. "And in whose presence, too! In the presence of the brother of your Sire! In the presence of the Commanders-in-Chief! You . . . cub! . . . Do you know what that means? A pipe-clayed pouch! A private's tunic! Reduced to the ranks . . . that's what you deserve!" And with that he struck his horse a swinging blow on the neck. His sharp profile stood out distinctly against the background of the bright, sunny sky and gave the impression of an eagle wearing a General's plumed hat.

Silence ensued. Barclay sat motionless in his saddle, calm, almost indifferent. The Cesarevitch dug his spurs into his roan and reined in among the group of officers of the suite. Tol's face went livid. Raising his hand to his hat in salute, he drew up so stiffly that he almost looked lean. In another instant large transparent tears were rolling down his cheeks. Bagrattion turned to Barclay and said:

"You are right, Mikhail Bogdanovich. It is my opinion too that this position is worthless. We cannot give battle here. It is a great pity that we were brought here. We must retreat! We must make for Gzhatsk without delay, and there wait for Miloradovich and his reinforcements. There we shall put up a fight, and we shall not retreat another step!"

Barclay remained silent. How could he say "Yes" or "No" when, obviously, he would no longer be in command at Gzhatsk? But how difficult it was to say this openly! Very difficult! If only somebody would help him!

As if in answer to his prayer Bagrattion spoke. He understood, and having understood he said bluntly:

"The new Commander-in-Chief may arrive in Gzhatsk; but act according to your own discretion, Mikhail Bogdanovich!"

And saying this he looked round with such a frank smile that Barclay, the Cesarevitch, Yermolov and even Tol gained the impression that in looking straight into the faces of friends and enemies he wanted to imbue them with a particle of his own simple, honest and magnanimous spirit. Barclay bowed his head.

"I doubt whether I shall be in command in Gzhatsk, gentlemen," he said. And turning to General Kiekin, his adjutant for the day, he added:

"Issue, at once, the order to retreat, to commence at 4 a.m. tomorrow morning!"

On the way back Yermolov rode up to Tol and said to him:

"How could you behave like that, Karl Fedorovich? Any man can make a mistake, but why did you bristle up like that?!"

Tol looked up at him angrily and replied in French so that Bagrattion might not understand:

"*S'il n'y a pas de position, il faut en faire une. C'est mon métier—faites le vôtre aussi bien.*"*

The muffled roar of artillery was heard from where the rearguard was posted. This was Platov holding up the French who were trying to force their way to Moscow.

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* When no position is available, one has to be made. That is my job. Try to do your as well as I do mine.

"Tomorrow I shall put in a request to be transferred to the fighting forces," thought Tol to himself.

* * *

Dorogobuzh had only two streets intersected by small side streets and lined with low wooden houses. In the middle of the town, reaching down to the river, there was a wide square, overgrown with grass and wild flowers, where, in the daytime, cows and geese found peaceful pasture. Just now, however, on this miserable evening, which heralded the approach of an early autumn, troops were passing through the square. The Commander-in-Chief halted to watch the mixed Grenadier Division march past.

The inhabitants had abandoned the town. Next day, after beating off the French, the rearguard would arrive. Dorogobuzh would go up in flames, and nothing would remain of it except bare chimneys and heaps of charred rafters. This had been the fate of no few small towns through which the Army had retreated. The enemy might have found warm and comfortable quarters in thousands of houses made homely by numerous generations of Russian people, but he did not find them! Nobody had any doubt but that this was the best, the only thing to do. This scene of wrecked homes, other people's yet their own, infuriated the retreating Army, not only against the French, but also against Barclay.

A cold, heavy rain was falling and the wind cruelly blew the slanting streaks into the frowning, pale and weary face of the Commander-in-Chief as he stood with two or three aides-de-camp on the edge of the Dorogobuzh town square. His cloak fluttered around him like a flag, now covering and now exposing the diamond Star gleaming dimly on his breast. Had he not held his plumed hat to his head, it would have been blown away long ago. As often happens in such cases, very few had remained of his numerous Headquarters Staff, but neither the rain, the sudden disappearance of his adjutants, nor his weariness could disturb his serenity. As the troops marched past the buzz of low conversation hung over the disordered ranks. Barclay knew what this meant:The soldiers no longer regarded him as their Commander-in-Chief. Now and again he greeted them, but his words were blown into the rain and darkness and died away with no answering echo. The soldiers would not respond. The buzz of conversation only increased in volume and here and there a jeering voice was heard.

"Hark at him!" said Tregulyaev, mocking at the Commander-in-Chief. "Says nothing for months, saves it all up like his pay. When he does open his mouth he has nothing to say! We've been taught by our mammies and taught by the strap, but never have we had a teacher like that! Vlas! Why don't you shout to him: 'It's no use jumping out of the rain into the river to get dry!'"

Had Tregulyaev known what was going on in Starynchuk's breast just then he would not have teased him in this way. From the beginning of the retreat he had been filled with a consuming hatred for the man who was driving the Army away from the enemy as fast as he could make it move. He stepped into puddles without knowing or caring where he put his feet which were encased in boots worn to the uppers by endless marches. The tight high collar of his greatcoat, scorched at bivouac fires, suffocated him. On drawing level with the Commander-in-Chief he shouted:

"God punish the traitor!"

The buzz of conversation ceased in an instant. Barclay took a step forward. His aides rushed to the Carabineer's Company. A command was heard:

"Halt! Shun!"

A search was made for the culprit. It would have been no difficult matter for Starynchuk to hide in the darkness of the night. Tregulyaev prodded him in the back several times, hinting to him to make himself scarce; but Starynchuk had no intention of hiding. He drew himself up in front of Count Leiming and said loudly and distinctly:

"I said it, your honour!"

CHAPTER THIRTY

After outlining the extraordinary case of Grenadier Starynchuk, the Divisional Prosecutor, an official in a black uniform, with a long nose and the face of a Jesuit, stood to attention and remained silent. In preparing the case he had not given a thought to Starynchuk, to the reason why the latter had insulted the Commander-in-Chief, or to the Commander-in-Chief himself; he had very conscientiously and thoroughly dealt with the dry facts of the case, and the indictment he drew up contained a very detailed account of the defendant's army career. Hence, he was totally at a loss to understand why one of the members of the Court-Martial, Divisional Quartermaster, Lieutenant Polchaninov, not only expressed his disagreement with the verdict, but refused to sign it. It bore the signatures of the president and the members of the Court, and of the Prosecutor himself, but not that of Polchaninov. Not that this affected the case in any way. The offence was so heinous that according to the regulations of Peter the Great, the culprit was liable to the penalty of being hanged, drawn and quartered. The Court-Martial sentenced Starynchuk to be beheaded in conformity with the regulations of Empress Anne. Judging by precedents which had occurred since 1740, however, the Prosecutor surmised that the commander of the Division, by whom the sentence had to be confirmed, would commute the sentence to one of death by shooting.

* * *

Prince Karl Mecklenburg took up a pen and paused in reflection. "*Das ist schrecklich!*"* he thought to himself. It is possible to win wars without science, but it can't be won without discipline! Napoleon won't be defeated by soldiers like Starynchuk! But all the Russian soldiers were like him—

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* This is frightful!

ignorant, downtrodden, dull-witted and lacking in moral sense. *Das weist ja nicht was Ehre heisst!*[*] Had he done right in binding his fate with an army and a people who cannot be victors?

These reflections caused the Prince to feel a tickling sensation in the nose, as if he had taken a pinch of snuff. This happened to him rather often and was probably due to high blood pressure. He closed his eyes and waved his hands vigorously in a desperate effort to suppress a sneeze. At last the tickling sensation in his nose ceased. He opened his eyes and to his surprise beheld the dark figure of Colonel Prince Kantakuzen at the entrance to his shack, with Ensign Polchaninov timidly hiding behind him. The Colonel seemed to be greatly agitated. His swarthy face was flushed. He entered the shack and without ceremony strode up to the desk at which the Prince was sitting.

"*Par quel hasard vous trouvez-vous ici, prince?*"[**] asked the astonished Divisional Commander.

"Forgive me for intruding on you like this, Your Serene Highness," answered Kantakuzen, not in the least embarrassed. "I was in a great hurry, and the matter in hand warrants it."

"Come in, come in, my boy," he said, turning to Polchaninov, and then to the Prince again: "I have brought this young Ensign with me in the hope that he will be able to explain the case to Your Serene Highness better than I can."

"And a good thing too!" answered the Prince. "I want to give that young Jacobin a good drubbing!"

"You don't know him, Your Serene Highness. He is a good hand at that game himself. He may be a pretty little miss to look at, but he's Lucifer when roused! He has a kind heart, though, kind to the very bottom. And so he proved himself to be during the Court-Martial over Grenadier Starynchuk. I take the liberty of stating, Your Serene Highness, that that private is less to blame than may appear. To tell the truth, not he, but others are guilty!"

"For God's sake, what are you saying, Prince!" exclaimed Prince Mecklenburg indignantly. "I have only just read the record of the case. He actually called the Commander-in-Chief a traitor! It follows, therefore. . . ."

"It doesn't follow at all, I assure you, Your Serene Highness!" interjected Kantakuzen. "I don't know what's in the record, but I'm quite sure that it does not contain the fact that two days before the incident, His Royal Highness, the Cesarevitch, Constantine Pavlovich, commander of the 5th Corps, said the very same thing himself to the Grenadiers. True, His Royal Highness did not utter that atrocious word, but what he said was enough to put it into the mind of an ignorant soldier. Starynchuk merely repeated in his own way what His Highness had said. He may lack education, but there is no doubting his patriotism! Therefore. . . ."

The Prince again felt the tickling sensation in his nose and began to wave his puffy white hand.

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[*] They don't know what honour means!

[**] What brings you here, Prince?

"I know all that as well as you do!" he exclaimed. "But enough! I will hear no more! How can you fail to understand? I am a foreign prince. . . . Don't drag me into this sordid business! I, personally, am not in it! I am the law! The private will be shot! As for Ensign Polchaninov, I deprive him of his Quartermaster's post!"

"You will not!" shouted Kantakuzen, suddenly flying into a passion. "You will not! If you do, then you must shoot me too! And half the Army! Who do you think will allow you to do it! You are a foreign prince . . . . But our Cesarevitch is a Russian. The only way to get justice done is to go straight to him! I wish you a good afternoon, Your Serene Highness!" Turning to Polchaninov, he said: "Come on, my boy, let's get out of this!"

With that he stalked out of the shack, flushed and puffing, as if he had just got out of a bath.

"Stinking corpse!" he growled, "I'll show him! Come on, brother Polchaninov, let's first go to Prince Peter Ivanovich . . . then to old Kuruta . . . and then we shall see what we shall see!"

* * *

Waking from his after-dinner nap, the Cesarevitch left his tent, ordered his musket to be brought to him, and began target practice on the effigy of a soldier which he carried about with him for this purpose. He had been practising that morning, but try as he might, he could not hit the dummy's head. Now he tried again, gravely loading his musket and firing, strictly in accordance with the regulations, as if he were on the practice ground. While he was engrossed in these exercises Prince Bagrattion arrived to pay him a visit.

Since the Italian campaign of 1799 Constantine Pavlovich's attitude towards Prince Peter had been a mixture of respect, a little envy and dread of his biting tongue. The first two sentiments he called love, the last he called friendship; and he publicly boasted of these relations with Bagrattion.

Prince Peter dismounted. His face was pale and gloomy. The course the retreat was taking filled him with anxiety and alarm. Formerly he had given vent to his feelings in outbursts of anger and vexation: now he was sad and depressed. He was beginning to understand Barclay's operations, and even admitted that some good might come of them; but he still doubted whether this was the only way to proceed. On the other hand, after Smolensk, he was no longer so confident of the correctness of the offensive tactics which he himself had urged. All this made him feel very confused and depressed. Perhaps this explained why he was shaken by fever every other day.

"I have decided, Your Highness, not to interfere in anything," he said to the Cesarevitch, when they had entered the latter's tent. "I have long been convinced that my advice is never taken. I shall now agree to whatever is done. But the thought that we shall not give battle even at Vyazma makes my heart heavy indeed. We shall march there with the French at our heels, and then proceed further. And it's only five marches to Moscow!"

The Cesarevitch wrinkled his snub nose, which gave him the appearance of a pug-dog.

"Barclay is either very brave, or else an utter coward," he said huskily. "Imagine what would happen if Platov were not holding up the French with his rearguard! But Platov cannot be relied on. He is drunk almost every day. He says it is because he's being driven to despair by the retreats. I know, however, that he is dying to become a Count, but judging by the way things are going the chances of his becoming one are extremely remote. That's why he has taken to drink, the old dog! During the rearguard action yesterday the French pressed hard on his heels right into Semlevo, on top of our heads. What a shindy there was! . . . We got up and ran like rabbits . . . pitter-patter! So how can we rely on Platov? And yet, the enemy is almost under our noses!"

Bagrattion recalled how, at the beginning of the war, he had promised the Ataman victory, how he had tempted him with promises of a title for his son Ivan and for his daughter Marfusha, and how Platov had vowed to fight to the bitter end. . . . But what had happened? The retreat had crushed everybody. The Cesarevitch least of all, however. He was not despondent. . . . The King of Heaven's fool! . . . The enemy is under our noses!

He looked at the Cesarevitch's nose and smiled.

"Under whose nose, Your Highness?" he enquired. "If under yours, then Platov must indeed be making a mess of things. If under mine, he still has time for another drink!"

The Cesarevitch snorted and burst out laughing, and then, throwing his arms around Prince Peter, he hugged him boisterously. At this moment, the flap of the tent fluttered and the corpulent little figure of Kuruta appeared on the threshold.

"This morning, Your Highness, two Greeks sang your praises, Kantakuzen and I," he said. "Didn't your ears burn? I have come to reprove Your Highness, however, for going among the troops and making mutinous speeches against Barclay, for which other men suffer."

Bagrattion guessed that the little, sly, old man was in the plot.

"I, too, wanted to speak to you about that, Your Highness," he interjected. "You know what my opinion of Barclay has been up to now. Yours were honest words, but what has come of it?"

And he went on to tell the Cesarevitch the whole story about Starynchuk as he had heard it from Kantakuzen.

"Barclay is mortally offended," he continued, "and a good soldier is likely to lose his life. But he can be of service to his country. Who is to blame? Firstly, the soldier's ignorance. Secondly. . . ."

The Cesarevitch rapidly paced up and down the tent. He anticipated an attack and prepared to resist it.

"Secondly and thirdly!" he mocked. "Your Grenadier is as stupid as a ram! They're all a flock of sheep! Who dared to shout from the ranks? Who?"

"Let us admit that it is so, Your Highness," answered Bagrattion. "The offence is a grave one; but there was a profound cause. Your Highness is not entirely free from blame. Prince Karl is a heartless doll; he doesn't care a rap. It is as easy for him to have a soldier shot as to drink a glass of water. But what about us? We do not fear death on the battlefield—of your fearlessness I have long been a witness—but we are afraid to utter a word in support of justice and humanity. Why? And yet we are to blame. . . ."

Constantine Pavlovich brushed the wisps of red hair across his bald head with a rapid gesture and turning to Bagrattion demanded:

"What do you want of me, Prince?"

"You are the Corps Commander, and a Russian Grand Duke. . . . Save the soldier!" answered Bagrattion.

The Cesarevitch folded his fingers into a fico, put it to his lips and, extending it to Bagrattion, said:

"Would you like that? I don't want to swing from a lamp-post. And I am not going to connive at Jacobinism. You want to drag me into this mess! Yes, I uttered the words you refer to. I lost my wits for a moment and blurted them out, and I will answer for it! What answer can be demanded from a Russian Grand Duke? It's different with a private! The war is spoiling the soldiers, but I'll strip their hides off them for the sake of discipline! It is my duty to punish; mercy is the prerogative of the Tsar. In my quarrel with Barclay this trivial matter may hang like a millstone round my neck. Think it over, Prince! You will see that it is best for me to keep out of this affair."

Bagrattion glanced at Kuruta. The latter's wrinkled face was distorted as if by pain and he was shaking his curly head reproachfully.

"What do you think, is His Highness just?" Bagrattion asked him.

"N-no!" answered Kuruta in a tone of sadness and disgust.

"Oh, you Greek!" bawled the Cesarevitch. "In that case, why don't you take a birch and flog me?"

Saying this, he playfully hugged and shook the old man, looking straight into his sad black eyes. But Kuruta continued to shake his head. The Cesarevitch then rapidly grasped the old man's hand, raised it to his lips, and, kissing it, said:

"Well, advise me what to do, Greek!"

"Your Highness is guilty and the soldier must be saved. Only one man can do that."

"Who?"

"Yermolov. If he wishes it, the goat can be fed and the cabbage be spared!"

"Right!" exclaimed the Cesarevitch, "Come on, Prince, let's go to Pater Gruber. Hey! My horse!"

* * *

As usual, numerous matters had accumulated in the course of the day on which it was Yermolov's duty to report to the Commander-in-Chief. Although most of these were of the category known as "current matters," some of them, however, were very important and very complicated. As always, the Minister for War and his Chief of Staff worked together in perfect harmony. Yermolov formulated the decisions, quickly, concisely, and in excellent style, straight off, without making rough drafts and without a blot—and Barclay signed them. It was about midnight when the plan for sending off the wounded was completed. They decided to send those from the First Army to Volokolamsk and Tver, and those from the Second Army to Meshchovsk, Mosalsk, Kaluga and Ryazan. Four questions remained to be settled. Yermolov placed Tol's request before Barclay. In it the Colonel stated that he felt incapable of performing the duties of Quartermaster-General, and requested that he be relieved of that post and transferred to the fighting forces.

"It's pride rather than humility that Mr. Tol expresses," said Yermolov laughing. "He writes: 'Incapable,' but he means: 'Although my trumps have been beaten, I still have a good hand.'"

"He is very capable," said Barclay. "The blunder he made at Fedorovka was not due to ignorance, but to other, far worse, causes. Don't speak to me about them; I know what they are and have forgiven Tol. But he is a useful man in his present place and I know of no suitable substitute for him. He will soon forget Bagrattion's reprimand, recover his composure and continue to be useful to our common cause. Reject his request on the grounds that it is impractical!"

Yermolov placed another report before Barclay, this one from Platov. In it the Ataman explained the unpleasant incident that had occurred at Semlevo, where the French had broken his rearguard with such extraordinary ease and had pressed it almost to the camp of the First Army, as a result of which that Army had been unable to bivouac and was obliged to retreat further without resting. The explanation was very vague in spite of its verbosity.

"But the matter is quite simple," commented Barclay. "The French were able to reach Semlevo because the Ataman had operated only with the aid of Cossacks, although he had infantry at his disposal. And even then he sent only two hundred Cossacks into action. The country around Semlevo is heavily wooded, and it was easy for the French Musketeers to disperse the Cossacks. The worst of it is that this neglect was due to the fact that the Ataman was intoxicated. And worse than the drunkenness are the causes of it, about which he so loudly complains."

"The retreat is driving the Ataman to despair," remarked Yermolov. "He was promised a countship, and he sees no prospect of receiving it. That is the reason."

"I know," answered Barclay. "But he is the commander of the rearguard. The armies cannot feel secure as long as that security depends upon the vodka bottle. What would happen if the Don Forces followed their Ataman's example and got drunk and went to sleep. My conscience dictates the following decision: dismiss Ataman Platov from the Army and appoint General Konovnitsin commander of the rearguard."

Barclay became pensive. The dismissal of Platov was tantamount to the opening of hostilities against his traducers. Did he want this struggle just now, towards the end of the drama, when he had only a few days left in which to play the part of the universally hated Commander-in-Chief? Why had he not waged this struggle before? Barclay was one of those men from whom it was more natural to hear the word "no" than "yes," but unlike most men of this type, he confined his almost invariable "no" not only to those who demanded that he should say "yes," but also to his own desires.

Often, very often, he had received information about the activities of his avowed and secret enemies. He had only to have wished it for them to have been expelled from the Army long ago. Now and again he had felt a desire to expel them, but he had taken no action. Why? One reason was that a sort of Roman pride had restrained him from taking revenge upon the Generals who were hostile to him; he had endeavoured to rise above this mean and petty instinct and to see only that which was as pure and honest as self-evident truth. He himself regarded this as the main, in fact, the only reason.

But there was another reason, which was indeed the fundamental one. Barclay feared his enemies. It was plain, ordinary fear, with nothing lofty about it, of people who had connections at Court. Had he dared to dismiss these people from the Army, they would have rushed to St. Petersburg. Barclay was a poor courtier and was incapable of weaving intrigues. How could he have averted the storm that would have burst over his head in the royal apartments of the Winter Palace and at Tsarskoye Selo? It would have been unwise to rely on the changeable and faithless temper of the Tsar. The only thing that remained was to vanquish the malicious intrigues of his enemies and his own fears by patience. The main consideration was that the work in hand should not suffer. But the work in hand and Barclay were one! And so the main consideration was—to survive! The man in Barclay was proud and bold: the courtier who hid furtively in the narrow lanes of his heart, proved to be yielding and timid. That was why he had not fought his enemies.

Now the situation was different. The work to which Barclay had devoted himself with such zeal was slipping out of his hands, and with that he no longer feared the intrigues and slander of his enemies. Let them give vent to their venom and spleen—it was too late! The voice of pride rose within his breast and called for vengeance. The opportunity to punish those who had hindered him so long and had made his life as Commander-in-Chief a misery would last only a few more days, and he was determined not to suffer a moment longer. Platov must be dismissed!

Was the Ataman the only one who deserved dismissal?

"Take down one other order, my dear General," said Barclay to Yermolov, "His Highness, the Cesarevitch, is not much better than Platov. His conduct can be tolerated no longer. It is not that His Highness abuses me, it is not a matter of personal insult: the point is that it is impossible to keep the Cesarevitch away from Councils of War, and he criticizes and censures my orders so loudly that the secrecy of our deliberations is grossly violated. What can be more dangerous? I will ask you, therefore, to convey to His Highness, no later than tomorrow, the following order: immediately to leave the Army for St. Petersburg with despatches for His Majesty, the Emperor."

On hearing this Yermolov was so astonished that he dropped his pen. Barclay, however, remained imperturbably calm. He had already written the letter to the Tsar which the Cesarevitch was to take with him. In it he had frankly stated that the silly fable about his alleged treachery arose from the Cesarevitch's idle chatter, that the harm caused by this fable was infinite, and that his position as Commander-in-Chief had become impossible as a result of it. If he were to decide now to enter with the French into the general engagement that everybody so desired, this fable about the alleged treachery of the Commander-in-Chief would cause the Army to turn tail and run from the enemy at the slightest unfavourable turn in the battle. The only hope under present circumstances was the achievement of a speedy and easy victory. But such a victory was impossible. The time had come when a new Commander-in-Chief had become an absolute necessity. He would have to be a man who was free to make any decision he thought fit, and take full responsibility for whatever the results would be. . . .

After this Yermolov raised the case of Grenadier Starynchuk, although he had not the slightest hope of success. He had intended to play as his trump card the argument that it would be expedient to pardon the culprit and thus show contempt for the ignorance of Starynchuk and his like. This would kill all desire on the part of the Cesarevitch to attempt to influence the soldiers. Moreover, if Barclay displayed such magnanimity as to pardon such a mortal offence, even the blind would see the Cesarevitch's conduct in its true light. Now that Barclay had ordered the Cesarevitch to leave the Army this trump had lost its value. Yermolov, therefore, in great embarrassment, hastily told Barclay Starynchuk's story, meanwhile thinking to himself: "A nice Pater Gruber I am, to be sure! Why the devil did I allow myself to be persuaded by Prince Peter. . . ." Barclay, however, listened attentively to what Yermolov was saying and when he had finished he said in a soft, slightly trembling voice:

"Two years ago I, as Minister for War, issued a circular stating that science, discipline and military order could not rest entirely on harsh punishment. I still hold that opinion today. There are other means, far more effective than severity. Their good qualities emanate from good sense. One day discipline and good order in the Russian Army will be based on them but that will not be so soon. Today however. . . ."

He stopped speaking and fingered the papers on the table. Yermolov also said nothing and for a few moments intense silence reigned.

"The private you have just spoken to me about, my dear General," continued Barclay, "has committed a heinous offence against discipline, and also against truth and common sense. My heart is hard against him. I know what my duty is. To have him shot without further ado!"

He smiled, and there was unusual venom in his smile.

"But is that the chief thing? The more heinous the private's offence, the greater the guilt of His Highness the Cesarevitch. This is more important than all the rest. Reason puts a curb on my heart. And so, much against my grain, I shall change my mind in order to make His Highness conscious of the degree to which he has sinned against me. Therefore, I shall not order the man to be shot, but please take down the following: 'Whereas the mixed Grenadier Division forms part of the 5th Guards Corps, the punishment of the culprit comes within the purview of His Royal Highness, the Cesarevitch. To be sent to His Highness for confirmation as the competent authority.'"

"Will the Cesarevitch be able to confirm the sentence before his departure from the Army?" enquired Yermolov cautiously.

Barclay shrugged his shoulders coldly and said nothing. Yermolov guessed that the Commander-in-Chief was thinking not so much of the convicted soldier as of a way of causing the Cesarevitch as much unpleasantness as possible before his enforced departure next day. "Aha!" thought the sly Chief of Staff of the First Army. "I don't think His Highness will manage it. . . . Well! The private is saved again, and Prince Peter receives a present from Pater Gruber."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Day after day the bivouacs became steadily worse. Time passed in gloom and inaction. Twilight hung over the earth from morning till night. Either it began to rain, or else the grey clouds shook out their last few drops. The halts were made on flat sandy fields, with neither a tree nor a bush around. These fields looked like deserts in which the fortune and glory of Russian arms were to be buried. The sites of the surrounding villages were marked by bare chimneys, pointing gaunt fingers to the sky. Wounded horses stood forlornly waiting for death to relieve them. Clouds of smoke rising from the bivouac fires made of manure filled the air with the stench of burning dung and gradually spread like a pall over the whole camp. The officers, in thick mud-stained greatcoats and rusty-looking top boots, could scarcely be distinguished from privates, and the latter, their faces pale and haggard, wandered gloomily from fire to fire. There was no singing, no music, no lively conversation.

Still more gloomy was the mood of those around Sergeant Brezgun's fire. Here they were discussing the fate of poor Starynchuk. A Grenadier from another company came up to the fire with the usual request:

"Couldn't we borrow a bit o' meat, or a little *kasha*?"*

Tregulyaev turned on him and said gruffly:

"The beef's in the field putting on fat, and the *kasha* pot's gone a visiting. When it returns you can have some! Be off with you, brother!"

Resenting this snub, the soldier retorted:

"You're from Kashira, I see! Little to eat, but lots of bounce!"

At any other time Tregulyaev would have fired a volley of stinging repartee at the irate soldier, but this time he simply ignored him. His thoughts, like those of his friends, were entirely taken up with Starynchuk.

"His soldiering days are over now, poor beggar!" said Brezgun mournfully. "What was he to me? I hadn't known him long at all, but"—here he tapped his chest with his outspread fingers—"wherever you touch, it hurts! And he was such a fine soldier too!"

"His heart was breaking!" answered Tregulyaev. "He couldn't stand it any more! It had to come out! But some get away with a whole skin, while others get it straight in the eye!"

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* Porridge.

While this conversation was going on the twilight passed into night. The weather began to improve. The grey clouds dispersed and a golden moon rose slowly in the serene, dark blue sky, flooding the land with its pearly light. Sergeant Brezgun was moved to prayer. Dropping on his knees, he removed his tall shako and then his curly black wig; and his head, as bald as a man's knee—except for a fringe of thin grey hair at the nape of his neck—glistened in the moonlight as he prayed:

"O God, rest the soul of Thy servant, the warrior Vassili. . . . Grant that he behold the faces of the saints, the source of life. . . . May he too turn to the path of repentance. . . . Heed our prayer for the departed. . . ."

Tregulyaev, also bareheaded, stood by Brezgun's side in deep reflection. Suddenly, out of the night, came loud voices and the sound of tramping feet on the firmly packed earth of this pasture land. And soon, marching straight to the campfire, came Starynchuk, accompanied by the guardroom Sergeant and half a dozen Dragoons. With a beaming smile stretching across his long face, Starynchuk halted and began to shift awkwardly from foot to foot, as if wanting to say something; but, as usual, although the words were on the tip of his tongue, he was unable to spit them out.

Brezgun jumped to his feet, trampling upon his wig in his excitement.

"Oh, you rascal! Where have you sprung from!" he exclaimed not believing his eyes.

"Turned up like a bad penny!" Tregulyaev chimed in and rushed into Starynchuk's arms. "Poor beggar! But God protects poor beggars! So they pardoned you?"

"Yes," answered the criminal.

"Who?"

"He, himself."

"Who, himself?"

"Mr. Traitor!"

Brezgun spread out his arms in amazement and disgust.

"Shut up, you fool!" he growled.

Tregulyaev shook with laughter. The whole incident was astonishing in the extreme; but most astonishing of all was the news that Starynchuk had heard in the guardroom: Kutuzov was coming!

"Where's he coming? What for?" demanded Brezgun, losing patience and beginning to get angry.

But this news was already spreading through the camp like wildfire. Divisional Quartermaster, Ensign Polchaninov, came up to the Sergeant's fire. Just as he had been swept off his feet by Felich in Smolensk, so was he swept off his feet by the events now happening around him. In Smolensk, however, he was carried away by the stream of the petty affairs of life; in Dorogobuzh he was swimming manfully against the tide and held his ground. Whatever one might say or think, it was he who had saved Starynchuk! Turning to Brezgun he said:

"Let's have a look at the criminal. I haven't set eyes on him yet."

The tall Grenadier drew himself up to his full height in front of the Ensign. His face was lit up by a broad and happy smile. Polchaninov felt a queer sensation in his breast. Had he not refused to sign the verdict, had he not rushed to Kantakuzen and with him to Prince Mecklenburg, and then to Bagrattion and Kuruta, Starynchuk would not be standing at this campfire smiling happily, but would be lying in his grave with a bullet in his heart. He felt that there was something great and magnificent in this. It was like a victory of the future over the past and the mysterious destiny of the present. And he, Polchaninov, had achieved this victory! This was something different from losing Sister at cards! Then, he had been rapturously grateful to Travin for having saved his horse. Now, he had himself acted with a boldness that had sent his spirits soaring to the sky and had filled him with proud consciousness of his own strength. Starynchuk's case had exercised a profound influence upon Polchaninov. It had transformed him from a youth into a man, resolute and confident in himself. Nevertheless, much of the youth still remained in him.

"There is talk, your honour, of Prince Mikhail Larionovich coming to take command over us," remarked Brezgun cautiously.

Polchaninov made no reply. Instead, he threw his head back, placed his hand to the back of his neck, pointed his elbow outward, strutted round the fire and began to do a step dance.

"No more squabbling! No more retreats! Hurrah!" he exclaimed.

In an instant the cheer rang through the whole camp of the First Army and was echoed by an answering cheer from the camp of Bagrattion's troops.

"Kutuzov is coming to beat the French! Hurrah!" yelled Tregulyaev.

These first few minutes of mighty rejoicing over the rumour that Kutuzov was coming revealed the degree of despondency, discontent and desire for a change to which the armies had sunk.

"Kutuzov is coming to beat the French!" these winged words of Tregulyaev's were repeated everywhere.

Nobody in camp slept that night. The Carabineers gathered round Sergeant Brezgun's campfire, and throwing clumps of dung into the fire from time to time, they listened to the tale he told.

SERGEANT BREZGUN'S STORY

It's not a comb that combs your hair, but time. Before you can look round you find you are old. Life passes away like a village on fire. I don't mean to say that we ought to cling to life; God save me from thinking anything like that! What I mean is that we must live worthily. Death is worth only a copeck, they say. That's true! But every copeck is money worth earning! We must earn death in a way that will make it worth while. We old 'uns were trained under Mikhail Larionovich Kutuzov and he taught us how to live and how to die.

In eighteen hundred and five the Russian Army reached a little Austrian town named Krems, on the River Danube. That's a wide river, I can tell you! No wonder they sing songs about it even in our villages. Well, the Army reached this town. By this time all the spunk had oozed out of our faithful Allies, the Austrians, devil take them! Oozed out to the last drop! They had a General, Muck,* his name was. What a name! You couldn't think of a worse. Muck! Why, the very sound of it is indecent! Well, this rascal, without more ado, goes and surrenders with his Army of seventy thousand men! Our goose would have been cooked long before we got to Krems had it not been for Peter Ivanovich Bagrattion, you can take my word for it!

Near the town of Am. . . . Phew! It's a long time since I've been in those German parts, and their lingo doesn't come so easy to me now. Near Am. . . . Amstetten, Prince Peter Ivanovich kept the French at bay like a lion and covered the entire Army. That's how we were saved. And so we got to Krems and halted there. That's where you cross the Danube. Things became hotter and hotter for us every hour and we were having a very rough time. Bonaparte with his Army was treading on our tail and driving us to the river, while his underlings were trying to get into our rear from the other side. But Mikhail Larionovich had his own plans. We flew across the river like birds on the wing and gave Marshal Mortew* such a leathering that he went scurrying back as fast as his legs could carry him. Night came on. . . .

Well, I tell you straight: may God, the Creator of all things, save us from another night like that! It was pitch dark. Never saw anything like it before or since. This was in October. No moon, no stars. And all around, whichever way you looked, there were flashes—broad sheets and thin forked streaks. These were the guns and muskets in action in the mountains. And what mountains! Covered with tall forests, so dense, you could barely pass two abreast. What was to be done? We had to move on. And we did. And once started, we pushed through, you can be quite sure about that!

Suddenly we heard that the Austrians had allowed Bonaparte to get right near their capital, Vienna, and that he was already marching to cut us off from the other Russian Army that was coming to our assistance. Again what was to be done? We could either hurl our forces against Bonaparte and take a chance, or put up a screen. Mikhail Larionovich always liked to keep his cards to himself and to show his hand only when things were absolutely clear. He decided to put up a screen. He calls Peter Ivanovich and says:

"My dear Prince, friend, son and comrade! I rely upon your strong arm! Protect us! We shall follow in your rear, get out on the high road and join the Army that's coming to our assistance."

Peter Ivanovich answered very simply:

"Yes, Sir!"

The vanguard. . . . I was in it. Four thousand men—and only one battery! A pretty pickle, I can tell you! Bonaparte had only to raise his foot to squash us like beetles! We all realized that we were booked for the evening sacrifice. Even the men in the baggage train realized that. And Mikhail Larionovich and Prince Peter Ivanovich had no doubt about it either. The way those two said good-bye to each other was a sight that did your heart good. I turned fifty-eight the other day, and I shall never forget that scene even if I live as long again. The old General hugged our Prince and kissed him on both cheeks. . . . Ouch! [clearing his throat] Devil take it, I must have swallowed a bit o'baccy! . . . The Prince bowed his head and Mikhail Larionovich blessed him three times! As if we were going on a crusade! In other words—going straight into the jaws of death. . . .

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* Mack—pronounced in Russian as if spelled with a "u."

** Mortier.

The Austrians were prancing in front of us, and Prince Peter Ivanovich depended on them. At last we reached the little town of Shen. . . . it's a good job there are no bones in a Russian's tongue, otherwise we'd break them trying to pronounce these names! . . . Shengraben,* that's what it" called. Here the Austrians showed their true colours. Without saying a word, they scampered off, wagging their tails behind them! There's a nice kettle o' fish! Peter Ivanovich was mad. "Stop! Where to? I forbid it!" he roared; but he realized that these Austrians were not much use alive and wouldn't even make decent corpses. No use going into battle with a mob like that! So he just spat in disgust and said: "Let 'em go, the swabs!" After that he sent out the Cossacks and took up a position outside the town.

And then the fun started! Shengraben! The very name sends a shiver down my back! Oh, it was a scrap, I can tell you! That kinglet, Akim Muratov, Bonaparte's brother-in law,** went in and out among the French troops and was the first to attack us. He was followed by five Marshals, each in command of a full Corps. And all these against our four thousand! They had batteries galore, while we had only one! Well, what is there to be said? We were in a hole, I can tell you. We would have perished to a man had it not been for Prince Peter Ivanovich. He ordered our one battery to bombard Shengraben, and that little battery kept on firing until the town was set on fire. And while the town was burning our infantry, in perfect line, step by step, bleeding like pigs, but keeping the regulation distance between the lines, slowly retreated. And so we kept on till midnight. There was a little bit of a mix-up, here and there, you know. I won't deny that. But mostly it was because of the heavy casualties, and the accursed darkness. There were no faint hearts among us, though. Bonaparte himself came galloping up, yelling to his men to wipe this handful of us off the face of the earth. But they couldn't! Cannon-balls and grenades flying all around us. . . . The Cavalry went for each other hell for leather, while we had a go at the infantry. . . . Holy Mother! What a rumpus! And whenever it went hard with us, Peter Ivanovich came galloping up with reinforcements. Before you could look round our men had rallied.

And so, sauntering along in this pleasant manner, we reached the village of. . . . Oh, some dorf or other . . . and here, in the pitch black darkness, our two battalions and the Cossacks had to bear the whole brunt of Bonaparte's attack. Here I was wounded for the seventh time and dropped unconscious. When I came to I had my corporal's stripes!

Here the Sergeant paused.

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* Schöngraben.

** Joachim Murat, King of Naples. Brezgun Russifies the name.

There were four thousand of us when we started out—he resumed after a moment's silence—only half the number returned. As for the rest, everything went off according to the book. We gained a day and night! Meanwhile, Mikhail Larionovich pushed on far ahead; and that's exactly what we wanted. I was in the ambulance car, but those who witnessed it told me that when it was all over, Mikhail Larionovich put his arms round Prince Peter Ivanovich in front of everybody, pressed him to his heart and said:

"Come to my arms, my General! My hero! I will not ask about the losses. You are alive—that's enough for me!"

Yes, me lads! It's hard for a soldier to say how he can serve his country best, by living or by dying. But one thing is certain, and that is, that all through life we ought to prepare for a glorious death.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The horses were taking the hill at smart trot and the carriage rocked on its high springs like a boat on a rough sea. It was near midnight and about half a stage from Tsarevo-Zaimishche. The corpulent old gentleman in the carriage, with the large fleshy nose and folds of soft fat round the back of his thick neck, tried to peer into the night through the carriage window, but as he had only one eye, and poor sight at that, the darkness appeared to him like an impenetrable wall. He replaced the curtain in disgust, wrapped himself more tightly in his greatcoat and lay back on the cushions with a sigh. The sigh was followed first by a slight nasal whistle and then by deep snores. The old gentleman's silver-grey brows were puckered in a deep frown, but his thick lips were parted in a smile, as sometimes happens with sleepers. He was not asleep, however, he was deeply engrossed in thought. He had learnt this trick of pretending to be asleep when he wanted to think long ago and at last it had become a habit and a necessity. Notwithstanding the constant physical weariness from seventy years of a hard life, sleepless nights on the road and the unpleasant jolting of the carriage, his head was remarkably clear and fresh.

He had often noticed this before. The more difficult the circumstances, the more dangerous the situation, the clearer was his head and the more acute his mind. He snored lustily as he lay stretched on the soft cushions, but his thoughts passed through his restless mind in an endless procession.

"Well," he thought to himself, "I have enjoyed Fortune's favours and have seen her turn her stern back upon me. But there is a grave for every corpse, and a job for every living man. If shoulders are available, a yoke will always be found for them. God, what a yoke! Of course, Barclay could not bear this burden. He is honest, wise and shrewd; but he was unable to break down prejudice. He has done all he could. His fall was inevitable. Bagrattion is as sharp as a rapier, swift and tireless, the most chivalrous of men. True, any one of these features may be found among quite ordinary people, but in him they are all combined and so palpably directed towards good ends that one can almost feel them. Yes, they obscure Prince Peter's peculiar defects and make them almost imperceptible. That is so! But even he cannot save Russia. . . ."

And for the hundredth time he turned over in his mind what he was to do immediately he reached the Army in order to become its master from the very first moment, and to lead it along the road that he had already mapped out in St. Petersburg. Only by pursuing this road could victory be torn out of the hands of fate and Russia be saved!

Parallel with these weighty thoughts, the motley picture of his last impressions in St. Petersburg rose in his mind.

"Madame," he had said to Madame de Staël, "it is difficult, impossible for me to perform great deeds. I am old. Even my sight is bad!"

"Nevertheless, I am confident, General, that you will have occasion to repeat the words of Mithridates: 'The last I saw was the fleeing Romans,'" Madame de Staël had answered.

If only Madame de Staël possessed the same gift of prophecy as Le Normand!

The horses reduced their pace and the carriage rolled along more smoothly. At last the post house came in sight and soon lights shone dimly through the carriage curtains. Men came running out, calling to each other in anxious voices. Horses neighed and coach horns seemed to echo them. The last stage of the journey was reached.

The traveller would have been pleased to alight to stretch his legs, but wishing to avoid undesirable encounters he sent his aide-de-camp to reconnoitre. Returning, the aide reported:

"His Highness, the Cesarevitch, Constantine Pavlovich, is here on his way from the Army to St. Petersburg. His Highness is resting. General of Cavalry Platov is also here on the way from the Army."

"What's Platov doing!"

The aide-de-camp had already opened his mouth to answer: "Drinking rum, Your Excellency," when an iron hand pushed him aside and the ruffled head of the Ataman stuck itself through the carriage window. Matvei Ivanovich was, indeed, decidedly tipsy. His eyes were inflamed, and beads of perspiration glistened on his unshaven cheeks. The pungent smell of Jamaica rum filled the carriage. Platov was not only tipsy, but extremely agitated. His lips trembled, and his lean wrinkled face bore no trace of its usual cunning.

"Mikhail Larionovich!" he exclaimed in a shaky voice. "Your Most Serene Highness! Gaze at this old Cossack! Look what they have brought him to! I have lost all interest in life! I've been in the service for forty-two years, but never did I dream that I would come to this. I'll tell the truth. I know my own weaknesses. What with age and bad sight, my duties are becoming a bit too heavy for me. But . . . politics or no politics, it's my duty to fight! They won't let me. . . . The reprimand for Semlevo has knocked me down like a fever. People shun me as if I were the plague. . . . Oh, that Barclay! We couldn't get on together at all!"

"Why has Mikhail Bogdanovich treated His Majesty's brother and you, a worthy soldier, in this way?" enquired Kutuzov.

"The Cesarevitch for his opposition, and me, for the bad example I was setting the troops," answered Platov.

"Well, but what happened at Semlevo? You don't seem to be steady on your feet, my friend! Come into the carriage while the horses are being changed and tell me all about it!"

Taking a seat opposite Kutuzov the Ataman began heatedly to tell him his story.

"I was retreating to Semlevo through Slavkovo, exchanging fire with the enemy. The French vanguard had already reached Slavkovo. The bridge there is near a bog. . . . I tried to make a stand there. No use! The French bombarded the bridge with their artillery, and their infantry came pouring down upon us like potatoes out of a sack! I retreated step by step. I thought to myself: At this slow pace I'll hold out till nightfall. But what do you think! I held out till morning! But afterwards it became worse. The Frenchies were howling round me like Arabs in the desert. What a shindy! They were coming down from the highroad—legions of 'em. Near Semlevo there is the village of Ribka, on the River Osma. Well, I decided to have a crack at them there. Would you believe it, Your Serene Highness? I attacked the French cavalry six times and reached their guns! We charged like mad and fought like the devil! But no use! I retreated, half running, to Semlevo. That's all!"

Here the Ataman's feelings overcame him and he broke into sobs.

"Why have I been punished? Eh?" he moaned.

Kutuzov placed his plump, downy, freckled hand on the Ataman's shoulder and said soothingly:

"I shall not enquire whether you were drunk that day, Matvei Ivanovich. We have served together, and you did not drink. You've got sense enough to know what serving your country and winning its gratitude means, and you know the worth of that odious liquor. Man's conscience is broad. You are needed for the Service. Hence, there is no need for you to leave this carriage. His Highness, the Cesarevitch is resting. I dare not disturb his blissful repose." Pulling the bell he called out: "Are you ready, there!"

"Ready, Your Excellency!" came half a dozen voices in reply.

"Let's be off, then, and God speed our way!"

The horses tugged at the traces and the carriage rocked. Platov dropped down on his knees. His lips moved rapidly. Kutuzov could barely catch the words he muttered.

"There is an ocean, and beyond the ocean, rocky mountains. On the mountains stands the Archangel Michael. Save me, the servant of God. Amen! Guard my wild head with the luminous moon, the bright sun, and the white dawn, so that my enemies may not stain my body with blood and destroy my soul, and so that my adversaries may wallow in blood for ever and ever. And I, the servant of God, shall go to the green sea, to the ocean, to pray and worship. Amen!"

"What's all this?" asked Kutuzov in amazement.

"It's a prayer we say in the Don," answered the Ataman. His tipsiness had already evaporated and his face was gradually assuming its customary sly and roguish expression. "I have been keeping a copy of it in a talisman bag next to my cross since I was a child. It's the best charm against ill-luck you could ever have. You don't believe it, Mikhail Larionovich?" he exclaimed, observing a sceptical smile on Kutuzov's pale lips. "I'll prove it to you in a trice. I was sitting in the post house with a glass of grog in front of me and saying this prayer: 'On the mountains stands the Archangel Michael!' Suddenly I heard a noise. People were running round and whispering: 'He's coming! He's coming!' I rushed to the door. And there was the Archangel Michael in the person of Your Serene Highness right in front of me. Isn't that a miracle?"

* * *

In the cold grey morning of August 17 Kutuzov drew near to Tsarevo-Zaimishche. Just outside the village his attention was drawn to a troop of Cossacks who were escorting a captured enemy officer. Kutuzov summoned the Sergeant in command of the escort. It was Kuzma Vorozheikin. He rode up to the Field Marshal's carriage.

"Whom have you got there, my friend?" asked Kutuzov.

"An Eyetalian Colonel, Your Excellency!" answered the Sergeant smartly.

The Field Marshal looked at the prisoner with curiosity. The latter had a pale, frightened face. A roughly bandaged hand protruded from under his cloak. Kutuzov beckoned to him. The Italian hastened to the carriage. In it he saw a stoutish old soldier wearing a grey travel-stained greatcoat over a green infantry tunic with no epaulets or sash. His grey hair was covered by a white, peakless cap with red piping. His face. . . . Why, faces like that, at once ingenuous and sly, benevolent and stern, could be seen all over Russia! He had only one eye, the other had evidently been knocked out by a bullet. Not at all an impressive figure. He looked no more distinguished than a corporal. He might be a brigade commander—a divisional commander at the most, thought the Italian.

"Who are you, Mr. Officer?" enquired Kutuzov.

"Colonel Guglielmino, of the Italian Royal Guards, Quartermaster of Viceroy Eugene's 4th Corps, Your Excellency," answered the Italian.

"Prince Eugene is an old acquaintance of mine," said Kutuzov laughing. "How is our Prince Charming? When and where did he lose his Quartermaster?"

At the words "an acquaintance of mine," Guglielmino drew up smartly. "I was taken prisoner the day before yesterday, near the village of Mikhailovskaya, by the Cossacks of the rearguard of the Second Russian Army!"

"So Prince Eugene is at Mikhailovskaya! And where is His French Majesty, whom I have not met since eighteen hundred and five?"

"This must be Kutuzov!" thought Guglielmino, blinking in astonishment. And then aloud he answered: "I have no knowledge of the Emperor's whereabouts and therefore cannot tell you, Your Highness."

Kutuzov laughed and said: "Don't give me any higher titles, Colonel. The last one is quite sufficient. And so you have forgotten where the Emperor Napoleon is. You will have leisure in which to recall it." Turning from the officer he enquired: "Who took this fellow prisoner?"

Vorozheikin pulled himself up with a start and answered: "God guided me to do it, Your Highness!"

Kutuzov gazed at Kuzma with such benignity that the Cossack felt a tickling sensation in his throat.

"What a hairy giant you are, my friend! A veritable Samson. Tell me how you managed to hook this Italian?"

"With me hands, Your Highness, like a bustard on the ice!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" chuckled Kutuzov. "Like a bustard! Do you hear that, Matvei Ivanovich? Bustard! Bustard! Ha-ha-ha! Thank you, my friend. You have done well! Bustard! . . . What sort of a Cossack is he, do you know, Matvei Ivanovich?"

Platov had recognized Vorozheikin at once and answered without hesitation:

"The best Sergeant in his area, Your Highness. . . . The best of the best!"

"In that case, I congratulate you, my friend, on your promotion to Cornet," said Kutuzov. "And you, Ataman, must issue an order to the Don Force this very day announcing this promotion and relating the deed this officer has performed. And don't forget to mention the bustard! . . . Let her go!"

The carriage sped away and was soon out of sight, but Cornet Kuzma Vorozheikin continued to stand stock still by the side of his shaggy pony as if in a daze, unable to realize his good fortune.

"Good God!" he muttered to himself. "How did this happen? Here was I grinding away for years and years and suddenly. . . . But now look out! I don't think there's been another officer in our family. I'm the first. See where you've got to, Kuzma Ivlich!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Old Suvorov used to delight in upsetting the pompous ceremonies usually made for his official reception. He would be expected to arrive in a spanking carriage and pair, but would come rolling up in an ordinary post-chaise. All the dignitaries would go out to meet him at the city gates, but he would emerge from an obscure side street in the town.

Sometimes events for which people have been waiting long and impatiently also arrive in this whimsical, Suvorov way. People are not deceived, the events occur, but not in the way that was expected. They come either from a different direction, or at a different hour. People go out to meet them but find that they have already arrived and that they had almost missed them. Something of the kind happened to Tol on the seventeenth of August.

It was a dull day. The grey sky seemed so low that one wanted to stoop to avoid knocking one's head against it. Tol had been at work since early morning. In anticipation of Kutuzov's arrival—the Prince was expected in the evening—Barclay had instructed him to prepare a position for battle at Tsarevo-Zaimishche. The Colonel realized that the farce was over. Barclay no longer dreaded an engagement; it would be conducted by the new Commander-in-Chief. The recent tiff had thrown Tol into dejection and had knocked him out of his groove, so to speak, but not for long. He was one of those happy creatures, who, even if knocked over by a veritable landslide of trouble, will get up, shake themselves, and go on as if nothing had happened. In the last resort, the row had only served to refresh and invigorate him for new and more strenuous activities. With a great deal of fuss and bustle, bullying and threatening everybody who came in his way, he galloped from position to position, indicating to the quartermaster officers where the corps and divisions were to be posted.

"The middle column is to march out first, occupy its position and line up without any noise or confusion!" he commanded. "The regiments of the right wing are to go to the right, those of the left wing—straight ahead! The rest will come later! Hurry up! Look alive!"

He mercilessly spurred his little horse, whose long, grey tail could be seen streaming in the wind now in one place and now in another. Sometimes, on the way, Tol would interfere in matters that did not concern him. Thus, he came up with Travin's battery.

"Where have you posted your guns, Lieutenant?" he demanded. "What for? Why aren't the diopters* on?"

Travin knew where he had posted his guns, and why. As for the thingamijigs which were usually fixed at the back of the guns and interfered with the shooting, he had ordered them to be removed when he was still near Smolensk. What had this to do with the Quartermaster-General, anyhow? Travin turned his back on him without answering. Tol rode so close to Travin that the latter felt the horse's hot breath on his face. His broad chest heaving with suppressed passion, Tol demanded again:

"Where are the diopters, I ask you?"

Instead of answering, Travin softly whistled a tune. The face of Gunner Ugodnikov, who was standing at the gun on the right, became flushed and pale in turns. He loved his commander for his straightforwardness and fairness, and esteemed him far above all the "gentlemen" he had had occasion to serve under. But there was something in Travin's character that kept Ugodnikov in constant apprehension for the Lieutenant's safety. "He'll lose his head! He'll go down for nothing at all! His temper will be the death of him!" he often thought to himself, and he tried to guard Travin from trouble with the watchfulness of a devoted nurse. Trouble had now arrived in the person of the Quartermaster-General, whose stern and vindicative nature was common knowledge. Tol was puffing like a kettle on the boil. Travin kept on whistling. Ugodnikov, mentally making the sign of the cross, stepped forward and said:

"We removed the diopters ourselves, your honour. They are not much good. As soon as one gunwheel is a little higher than the other, you can't take aim with them."

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* A range-finding instrument. The Kabanov diopter—named after the inventor—was then in use and was very imperfect.

Tol gazed at the soldier in amazement, but his wise, grave face made a deep impression upon him. The Lieutenant's conduct had been queer and, to say the least, offensive; but it would have been unwise to start a quarrel or fight a duel with him. The audacity with which the soldier had stepped forward to save Travin also saved the Quartermaster-General from an awkward predicament. For this he was grateful to Ugodnikov. Turning to him, he asked in a surprisingly mild voice:

"How do you manage to take aim without a diopter, young fellow? Demonstrate it!"

"Very simply, your honour!" answered Ugodnikov. "Mr. Lieutenant taught us. We do it like this!"

Ugodnikov bent down to the six-pounder, placed the tips of his thumbs together over the sight and trained the gun by the angle formed by the joined thumbs.

"We never miss, your honour!" said Ugodnikov in a confident voice.

"Perfectly astonishing!" thought Tol to himself, again regretting that he had so rashly raised the point about the diopters. But he could not very well retreat before this out-at-elbow Lieutenant.

"What sort of horses have you here, Mr. Officer?" he demanded angrily. "They are fit only for the knacker's yard! . . . All in sores! . . . The tails of those front horses are quite bare! You don't seem to care much for your reputation, Mr. Officer!"

Travin turned slowly to the Colonel and muttered through his teeth:

"I am very sorry to hear, Colonel, that in your opinion the reputation of a Russian artillery officer depends upon cattle."

The sly, cackling laugh that old men utter was heard behind the backs of Tol and Travin. Both turned round. On an ancient Mecklenburg gelding sat Kutuzov, gleefully swaying in the saddle. He wore the same clothes that he had worn on the road: an unbuttoned tunic without epaulets revealing a frayed white waistcoat, and a white peakless cap. The only difference was that he did not wear his greatcoat; he had a sash across his breast and carried a riding whip. Next to him were Bagrattion on his prancing steed, and Barclay, sitting motionless on his staid mount. Behind them the Generals in their resplendent uniforms and fluttering plumes made whispered comments to each other. Where had they sprung from? How could they have come up unobserved? Tol broke into a sweat with astonishment and stiffly saluted the Field Marshal.

"How do you do, Karlusha!" exclaimed Kutuzov greeting the Colonel. "You were talking nonsense, and I overheard you. There's no harm in my overhearing you, because I am not a scandalmonger, am I? Those diopters are really useless, you know! They ought to be taken off all the guns. If that were done everything would be just as you like to have it. *Steif gerade und einer wie der andere!* * But that gunner is a gem! Come here, my lad!"

Ugodnikov stepped up to Kutuzov as if he were on parade, raising his legs stiffly and kicking out his toes with such vigour that Kutuzov laughed again.

*** Straight, level, and all alike.**

"Have you ever been under my command, my lad?" enquired Kutuzov.

"At Austerlitz, Your Excellency!" answered Ugodnikov.

"I guessed you were one of my men!" continued Kutuzov. And turning to Barclay, he said: "Some people think that war spoils a soldier, Mikhail Bogdanovich. I hold the opposite view. If all the German tricks that have been played on the Russian soldiers have not spoilt them, they must be splendid men! What's your name, young fellow?"

"Gunner Ugodnikov, Your Highness!"

"Good lad, good lad! He is a good lad, isn't he, Prince Peter? Ekh, Mikhail Bogdanovich! To have men like that and yet keep on retreating! How do you explain that?"

Kutuzov uttered the last words in a loud voice and in doing so he scanned the faces of the soldiers before him with his dim eye. He did not want to miss the impression created by this utterance, for which he had prepared long before. He saw exactly what he had expected. All the gun crews seemed to start as the feeling of pride and gratitude welled up in their hearts. "Now we're all right!" was the thought that flashed through their minds. "The old man knows how to treat a soldier! With him in command we shall go through fire and water!" The same mixed feelings of pride and gratitude agitated Bagrattion. His turn for rejoicing had come. What a weight had been lifted from his heart! It was no longer necessary to combat another's caution or to flee from his own impetuosity. All that was over. Everything in its proper time and place. Amstetten. . . . Schöngraben. . . . Hail mature and tested wisdom! Prince Peter Ivanovich caught sight of Barclay's gloomy face. When a man's joy is equal to the suffering he sometimes has to endure, it is hard for him to bear it! Joy makes men extravagant; it causes them to squander their wealth. Bagrattion rode up to Barclay and said:

"Smolensk is behind us, but Moscow is before us! Stand no longer on ceremony Mikhail Bogdanovich! Would it not be better if we drew spiritually closer?"

Kutuzov turned to Travin and asked:

"Are you not the son of Yuri Petrovich, who retired as a Brigadier, and afterwards 'dozened'* in Moscow?"

"Yes, I am his son, Your Excellency," answered Travin.

"Well, well, well! Why, I sat on the same form with your father in the Engineers' Corps. . . . And a dashing fellow he was, too! You seem to take after him. You are keen and sharp-tongued. . . . That's the kind of men we want! As for Karl, you must make allowances for his hot temper and loquacity. I have known him a long time. I knew him when he still sucked his thumb. Talks too much. Karl, my boy, talk must be like a punch: deliberate, strong and stinging. Remember that! Travin . . . son of Yuri Travin. . . . Come to me, you young ruffian, and let me embrace you!"

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* In the reign of Catherine II Colonels were very often retired with the rank of Brigadier in "dozens" and were therefore known as "dozener Brigadiers."

* * *

Some of the Generals favoured the position at Tsarevo-Zaimishche, others thought it weak. Undoubtedly, it had its good sides. The open nature of the country would prevent the enemy from concealing his movements. All the elevated positions would be controlled by the Russian troops, and this was very convenient for the artillery. On the other hand, the flatness of the area provided no good strong points, while the river with its marshy banks in the rear of the Russian lines would hinder a retreat.

Nevertheless the Army lined up in battle order and fortifications were built at various points of the position. True, the troops had expected and had prepared for an engagement so many times, and had so often retreated in sight of the enemy, that they had almost given up all hope of a general engagement. The arrival of Kutuzov, however, the evident advantages of the Tsarevo-Zaimishche position, and the fortifications that were being built gave them reason to believe that the decisive day had arrived.

A conference of the Corps Commanders was taking place in the hut occupied by the Field Marshal. Kutuzov was sitting in an armchair in the middle of the large room surrounded by these gorgeous, handsome, lithe and dashing officers. In their presence he seemed so short, fat and clumsy and even pitiful with his squinting and continuously watering eye. His faded tunic, his sash with its worn fringe, and his sword in a battered scabbard suspended from a strap across his shoulder, increased the impression of insignificance and slovenly old age. Retired invalids like this might be seen in hundreds at the Pay Office of the Ministry for War in St. Petersburg, coming to receive their pensions. Nobody had ever seen a Field Marshal like this before. Kutuzov spoke in a low voice and while he was speaking he seemed to be thinking of something else. Nevertheless, no matter how loudly and heatedly the Generals argued, the Field Marshal's low mumbling was distinctly heard.

"Our task is no longer to seek a position, but to act!" Bagrattion had said: "In spirit and unity we are far superior to the enemy. . . ."

"Sound, quite sound. What you say is absolutely sound, Prince Peter! What is your opinion, Mikhail Bogdanovich?" said Kutuzov.

"We must accept battle," answered Barclay firmly. "The obstacles which have prevented us from doing so up to now no longer exist."

"Quite sound!" interjected Kutuzov again. "I am extremely obliged to you, Mikhail Bogdanovich, for the measures you have taken to prepare for the battle. And the position here is good. Excellent, in fact!"

Rayevsky sat silent, and it was quite evident that he had no intention of speaking. Nikolai Nikolayevich knew Kutuzov and was convinced that he did not in the least solicit the Generals' opinions in order to enable him to decide whether to give battle at Tsarevo-Zaimishche or not. And the Field Marshal, glancing at him with his single eye now and again, knew why Rayevsky remained silent. To prevent others from guessing the reason he said:

"I do not hear your voice, hero of Saltanovka! Indeed, why waste words when deeds speak so loudly! Silence is golden! That's sound, very sound!" And turning to Platov he said:

"I am not asking you anything. . . . I know that you are restless, eager to go into battle. . . . Get ready, brother! I shall give you a prominent role to play." To avoid giving Matvei Ivanovich the impression that he intended to put him in command of the rearguard again he added, turning to little Konovnitsin:

"Even if it costs you your life, Pierrushko, you must not permit the French to come any nearer than two marches to our rear!"

And so Platov had not been forgiven for the Semlevo affair after all. The Field Marshal's gaze rested on a curly-haired General, with a large hooked nose and a proudly protruding chest. This was Miloradovich, who had only just arrived from Kaluga with sixteen thousand hastily drilled recruits. He was quite an educated officer. He had attended courses of lectures at the Universities of Königsberg and Göttingen, and had studied gunnery at Strasbourg and fortifications in Metz. Furthermore, he was extraordinarily brave and energetic. Nearly all the way from Kaluga his troops had ridden in peasant carts which he had requisitioned in order to get here the sooner; but they arrived without their arms and knapsacks, which had remained in the baggage train.

"Misha, my dear boy!" said Kutuzov to him. "I am delighted with the speed you made! Angels don't fly as fast!"

The one to insist more strongly on a battle being fought at Tsarevo-Zaimishche was General of Cavalry, Baron Bennigsen, who had been appointed Kutuzov's Chief of Staff. Bennigsen stood all the time and owing to his enormous height, his grey head almost touched the ceiling. His long, dour face bore a cold expression, but the arguments he so vigorously urged in favour of giving battle poured forth like water from a hose pipe. He saw nothing but good in the Tsarevo-Zaimishche position, and was convinced that success could be the only result. Now and again he rapidly passed his long, pink tongue along his thin lips; this betrayed his irritation. Indeed, Bennigsen did not like the course the deliberations were taking, in which he could merely express an opinion, instead of hearing and weighing the opinions of others. His pleasure at being on active service again and the prospect of at least influencing, if not directing, the course of operations, was marred by the consciousness that he was not in complete command, to which he had become accustomed. For a long time he had occupied a position—with dignity and distinction in his own opinion—equal to that in which Kutuzov now looked so pitiful and even ridiculous. Bennigsen was the only General in Europe whom Napoleon feared. Pultusk and Preussisch-Eylau were proof of this. What could Kutuzov boast of? Ismail and Austerlitz, now matters of history, which could only make historians blush? Kutuzov was perfectly well aware of what Bennigsen was thinking and of the reasons which prompted him to insist so strongly on a battle being fought at Zaimishche. "A fire-hose," he thought to himself with vexation, "and a leaky one at that. . . . He must be shown that although the stream carries far, the water does not reach the fire. . . ."

"Supposing I put you in charge of the attack, Baron?" he asked suddenly. "It will not diminish your confidence in success, will it?"

Bennigsen rapidly licked his lips and replied:

"I cannot say in advance. But how can one have any doubt about success when our gallant troops are being led by a captain like Your Excellency!"

Bennigsen prided himself on the skill with which he had saved himself and on the smartness of his repartee. Kutuzov beckoned to Tol and said to him in a whisper:

"Send the Horse Artillery to the Ryazan Road this very day, Karl!"

Amazed at this order, Tol bent down and asked the Field Marshal in a whisper:

"What will the artillery do on the other side of Moscow, Your Excellency?"

"Take a rest. It needs it, poor thing!" answered Kutuzov.

Failing to understand, Tol continued to stoop over Kutuzov, and the latter repeated his order, still more softly, but so peremptorily that the Colonel started:

"Do it this very day!" Then, levering himself up with his arms on the armrests he rose slowly from his creaking armchair and scanning the faces of his Generals with his dim but watchful eye, said:

"Thank you, my dear Generals! It requires no little patience to make your opinions penetrate my old head. The English have a saying, and a very true one: 'Patience is a flower that does not grow in every garden.' Thank you. I see that with God's aid, and yours, I do not vainly cherish the hope of leading the Russian Army on to the broad path of glory. Thank you!"

He bowed to all, and turning to Tol he said:

"*Je suis à vous, Colonel. Nous allons travailler.*"*

Nearly all the Generals in the Russian Army were well aware of Kutuzov's shrewdness and cunning, but not all were enamoured with these qualities. Bennigsen positively detested them because of the danger to which they subjected his own artifices. Bagrattion admired them, for he knew that Kutuzov's cunning never exceeded the bounds of decency, and that his prudence was no more cribbed than his, Bagrattion's flights of imagination. True, Kutuzov preferred not to run risks, but there was boldness and enterprise in his caution, his plans were far-reaching, and what seemed to be the most modest of his undertakings had in view consequences of the greatest moment. Tol was aware of all this. And so, when he and the Field Marshal were left together, sitting opposite each other at a desk strewn with maps and papers, the Colonel weighed every word Kutuzov uttered.

"Our strength and resources are inexhaustible!" said Mikhail Larionovich, "but they must be husbanded so as to avoid blunders. *Se contenir—c'est s'agrandir!*" **

"I take the liberty of asking why Your Excellency ordered the Horse Artillery to be sent to the other side of Moscow?" said Tol. "I cannot imagine. . . ."

"Well, don't try, Karlusha! The distance from Tsarevo-Zaimishche to Moscow is a hundred and forty-seven versts. We must strengthen the rearguard. Konovnitsin will command it; but there must be no repetition of what happened to Platov at Semlevo. And you, my dear boy, must make it a rule: the Army is not to march night and day without discrimination any more. It must be fresh and full of vigour. Therefore, arrange the marches so that the men strike camp in the morning, halt at midday, and turn in at night. I want to drill this into your mind: the Russian soldier is a treasure. . . . I would carry the two armies in my arms if I could! Now take up a pen and write. . . ."

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* You and I, Colonel, will set to work.

** The abstemious rise to greatness.

Tol prepared to take down the order for the new arrangement of marches in the armies and in the rearguard. Why such marching orders should be issued on the eve of a decisive battle he could not for the life of him understand. He therefore enquired in a cautious tone:

"I presume, Your Excellency's orders will be put into force after the battle. . . ."

"Why after the battle?" interjected Kutuzov somewhat irritably. "Draft an order to retreat in view of the unsuitability of the position here!"

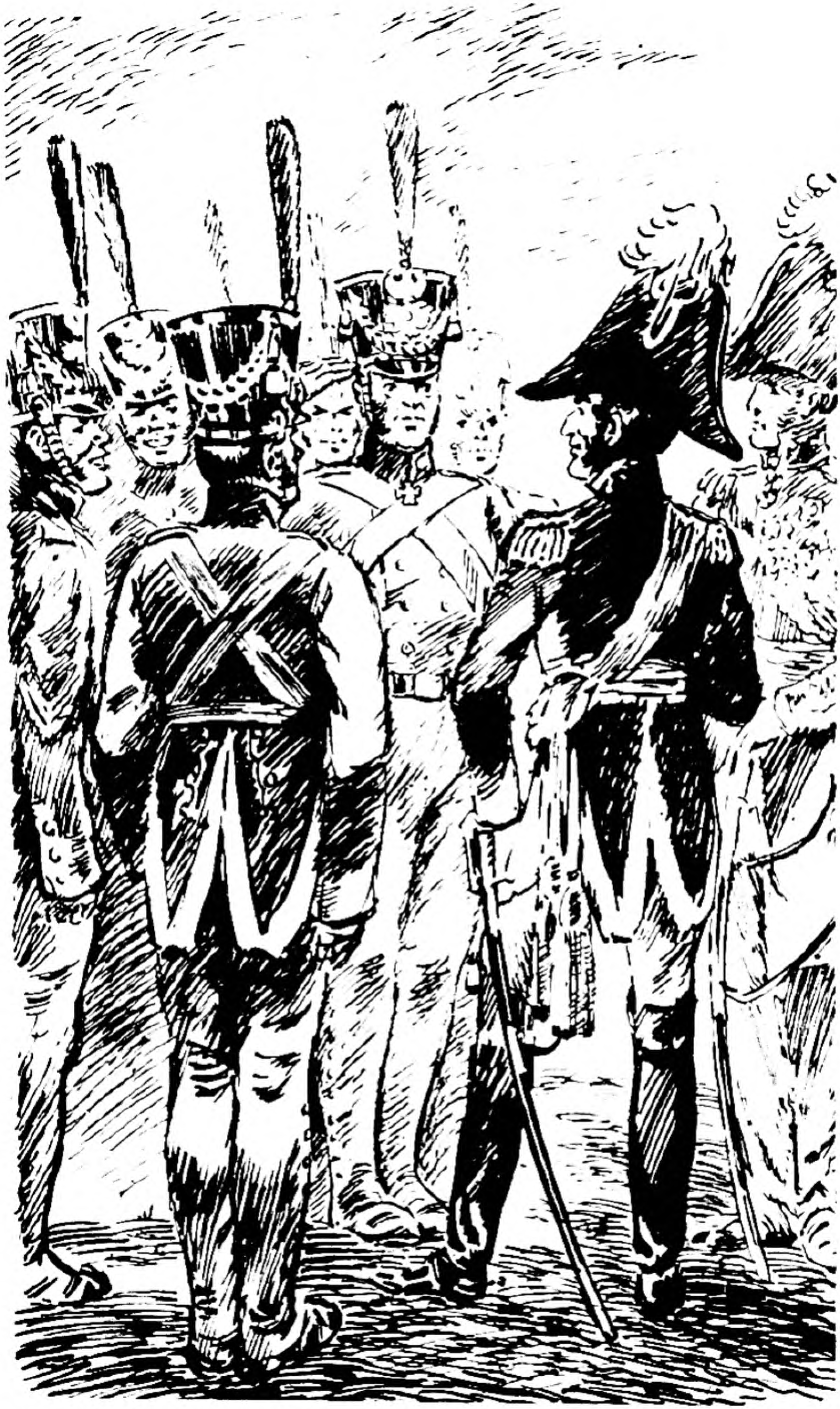
CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

To Her Highness, Anna Dmitrievna Muratova, in the city of St. Petersburg, at the Five Corners, in the House of Madame Lezzano.

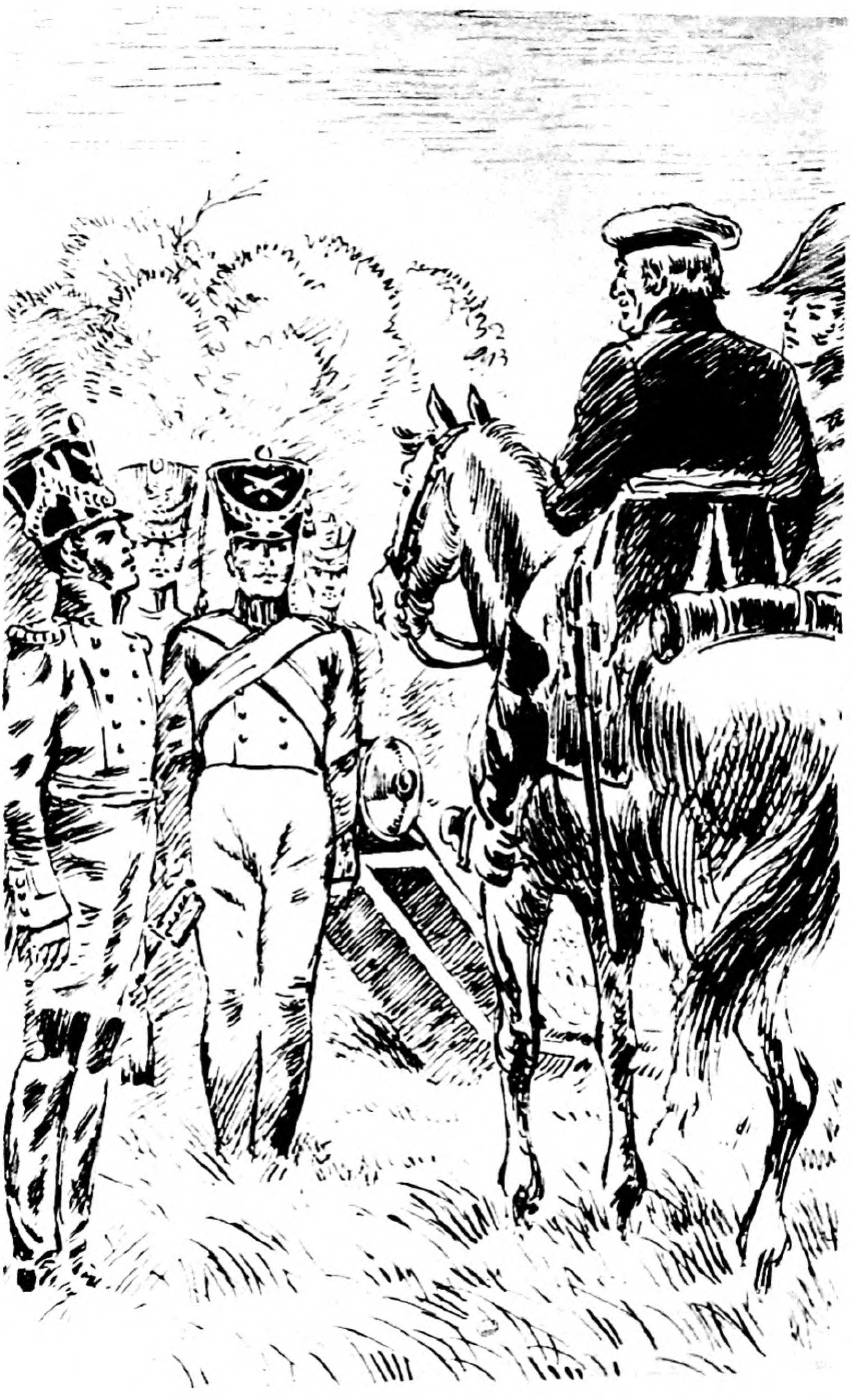
Dear, dear Netty.

I don't know whether this letter will cause you pleasure or pain. Our lives are replete with conflicting emotions, and every day the good is so interwoven with the bad that one no longer expects the former nor fears the latter. I have written to you about the injury I received during our retreat from Smolensk, about the acute pain I suffered, and how the surgeons expected gangrene to set in my hip. But everything has passed off happily. Their apprehensions proved to be unfounded. After lying in the tarantass for ten days I got up and walked, as feeble as the man in the Bible who was miraculously healed. The only difference was that I could not take up my bed and walk; my tarantass was too heavy for that. My injury caused me great pain, but if only you knew how I regret that it was not a wound, and that my arms, legs and chest are intact. Injuries, no matter how severe and dangerous, are not thought much of here. They are spoken of with disdain. Blood pouring from a gaping wound, a bone broken by shot or shell, an arm amputated by the surgeon's saw—these are treated with respect and judged to be a credit to one's honour and the triumph of chivalry. It is one thing to say 'he is injured'; to say 'he is severely wounded!' is quite another. Our spirit is such that only the irreparable can soothe. It was in this melancholy mood that I returned to my beloved Prince, and basking in joyous proximity to this extraordinary man, I perform all the duties he imposes on me with a zeal and energy that surpass all my previous efforts.

It so happened, however, that the very first commission the Prince charged me with had a very unpleasant sequel. I was instructed to convey a cordial message from Bagrattion to General Barclay (they are no longer at enmity with each other) and set out for the hut in which the ex-Commander-in-Chief had his quarters. This was the night after the Field Marshal's



"How do you do, old comrade?"



"Kutuzov turned to Travin...."

arrival. I found Barclay sitting in deep reverie at a table on which an untrimmed candle was smoking. His face, from which it is usually difficult to tell what is going on in his heart, clearly reflected inexpressible sorrow. I delivered the message. Barclay nodded aknowledgement without uttering a word and again became absorbed in his reflections. What was he thinking about? On all sides he hears the insulting appellation: "traitor!" A new commander has arrived to replace him. The troops which he had commanded hitherto are at the gates of Moscow. I felt sorry for Barclay and thought to myself: "One of the victims of fortune, who is unjust even to her favourites!" *Tel brille au second rang, qui s'éclipse au premier!** With these philosophical reflections I left the hut.

At the corner, in the utter darkness—this happened at night—I collided with Captain von Klingfer, General Barclay's adjutant. This is the officer with whom I was to have fought a duel in Smolensk. I have written to you about that incident, about the strange way in which it ended, and about our meeting in the ambulance train. I was then in great pain. Klingfer also suffered from a wound in the shoulder. Man invented gilt because gold is so rare, and he acquired politeness as a means of concealing the lack of kindness in human relationships. When fate placed us side by side in the tarantass, we began by being polite; but nothing draws people together so closely as mutual suffering. One's will takes no part in this. And soon Klingfer and I found that subtle, common tongue which soon leads to friendship. Klingfer's shoulder healed rather quickly. On parting we both felt that the sanguinary feelings that had prompted us in Smolensk were not of the finest, and not the only ones. . . .

My dear litle sister! It seems to me that when one acquires a thorough knowledge of men it becomes difficult to be enthused about anything. But I do not know men thoroughly, and I find things to be enthused over at every step. I was as delighted to meet Klingfer near Barclay's hut as if he had been my brother. We shook hands heartily and began to discuss events with natural ardour,

"Thank God the murmuring among the troops is subsidng," I said. "They sense the approach of the solemn days of the great climax and retribution. They are being led by a veteran. . . . It is said that the Field Marshal demanded from the Emperor complete freedom of action and received it. This means the end of retreats, and this is the best recipe for victory. . . ."

"I know all that" answered Klingfer with a coldness that surprised me, "but why do you think that Kutuzov will lead the Army straight to victory? I doubt it. He is more cunning than you think. After pushing General Barclay out of the post of Commander-in-Chief he will continue his tactics, for no other tactics can be pursued."

The vision of Barclay's melancholy figure rose before my eyes. He was suffering greatly. But God be with him, the Army and Russia cannot perish for his sake! A strange idea entered my head. Here was the difference between those who are close to Barclay and supported him, and us, who are wholeheartedly with Bagrattion and place all our hopes in Kutuzov. The former are serving Barclay, resent the way he has been treated, and want to subordinate our common future to the fate of this man. We, however, serve neither Bagrattion nor Kutuzov, but Russia and our glorious people! While we love and trust our leaders, we draw no distinction between them and the people and the Army, either now or in the future. I don't know whether I have clearly enough expressed the thought which suddenly struck me and vividly revealed to me how wide and impassable was the gulf that separated me from Klingfer. He and I are foes. Enmity is the substance of our relationships. What had taken place in the ambulance train had not been reconciliation, but merely an armistice! This thought flashed through my mind and remained there. And so I answered Klingfer hotly:

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* Often, those who are brilliant in the second rank are eclipsed in she first.

"General Barclay has only himself to blame for his dismissal, for he was entirely out of harmony with the troops. Kutuzov had no hand in it at all. I have it from my General that the Field Marshal. . . ."

Klingfer laughed insolently and said:

"Perhaps Prince Bagrattion is not yet aware that the Field Marshal has only just signed an order to retreat. . . ."

If that were true, Prince Bagrattion must have known about it. If he did not know, then. . . . So I exclaimed:

"I don't believe it! It is a lie!"

Our conversation, which had commenced so amicably, now gushed forth like a waterfall, dashing down from rock to rock. I have no wish to recall the offensive remarks that came flying from our lips, like corks from bottles. In an instant we found ourselves in the position from which decent people have no outlet except that which we had chosen in Smolensk. But Smolensk is behind us. Since then I have gone through, thought and felt a great deal. A duel? How stupid! But was there a wiser or fairer alternative? My heart sank in despair.

"My second will visit you within half an hour!" said Klingfer coldly, turning on his heel.

"Wait!" I shouted, my teeth chattering with rage. "Would it not be better to settle our score without the aid of these gentlemen? My second is—Russia! Our duel—the Battle for Moscow! I swear that every step I take will be in search of death for my country! Consent!"

Klingfer thought for a while and at last said:

"Very well! That is a wise decision. I swear to seek for death. Farewell!"

I now have a new friend—Lieutenant of Artillery Travin, a poor officer of the line, undistinguished and unpretentious, but a man with a large heart and a mind so fresh as to be brilliant. When I told him about my new conflict with Klingfer, and about the decision we had taken, he congratulated me in a few, but very powerful and significant words.

"It looks as though even aristocrats are becoming men!" he said.

Your friend and brother,
A. Olferyev.

The village of Tsarevo-Zaimishche,
August 18, 1812.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

The armies reached the Kolocha Monastery and there halted. At once the question arose of choosing a position for battle. The right flank of the Kolocha position was elevated and dominated the whole line, but if the troops on the right flank were crushed, the entire line would be immediately compelled to retreat. The only way of retreat lay through a narrow vale. While the Generals were discussing these questions, Lieutenant-Colonel Davidov and Ensign Alexander Rayevsky were lying on their greatcoats under a tall birch tree, engaged in conversation.

The strange things fate does: long ago, at the time of the Italian campaign, when Davidov was only fifteen, his father, now dead, had purchased the village of Borodino, near Moscow, with the surrounding hamlets. Borodino was only twelve versts from Kolocha Monastery. Consequently, Davidov was now on his own property. But how strange it all was now! Smoke from the campfires rose to the sky; bayonets glinted in the stubble fields and thousands of armed men were tramping his native hills.

"Alexander, my lad," he said, his bright, restless eyes gleaming, "we are lying on the very hillock where once I romped and dreamed. Here I read the thrilling tales about Suvorov's deeds in Italy. Look down there! Your father's men are building redoubts just below us. Do you see that wood behind us? The men are cutting a clearing. It is teeming with Chasseurs, right down to the marshes and moss. Once upon a time I used to roam down there with a pack of hunting dogs. Everything has changed! I am lying here with a pipe in my mouth gazing at the scene, but I have no corner in my own home, not even in a barn, they are occupied by the Generals. Crowds of uproarious soldiers are pulling down huts and fences; all they care about is their camp needs. Happy fellows! But what about me? I have invested all I have—my blood and my property—in the sacred lottery of war!"

As Alexander Rayevsky listened to Davidov a crooked smile spread across his lean, sallow face. Davidov and he were kinsmen, but the difference in their ages, and perhaps something else besides, prevented them from becoming intimate. His kinsman's ardour, sincerity and impetuosity seemed to him to be old-fashioned and ludicrous, like wearing a powdered wig, or knee-breeches. Davidov jumped up and put on his greatcoat.

"Blessed, thrice blessed is he who, withdrawing his sodden feet from the stirrups walks into his warm and cozy home!" he exclaimed. "Blessed is he whose kind travelling companion, the samovar, sings its endless evening song about his native land and happy days of yore! Oh, merry leader of the chorus of recollections, how I love thee! There's our old mansion over there, Alexander. Let's go there! There'll be no samovar, but the walls will sing!"

Soldiers were in possession of the house. The polished floor of the round reception-room was strewn with fragments of broken mirrors. The upholstering of the couches and armchairs was slashed and torn. Trooper Tsioma, of the Hussars, was hacking at the crystal chandeliers with a stick and shaking with laughter as he watched the prisms tumbling down like a hail of diamonds.

"What are you doing that for, you jackass?" demanded Davidov, flaring up at the sight.

Tsioma threw the stick out of the window, drew himself to full height, removed his shako from his head and, choking with laughter, barked in a loud bass voice:

"Oh, just like that, your honour, so as the Frenchies don't get them!"

Davidov raised his arm and was about to swing his fist into the patriot's jaw when Rayevsky intervened.

"There you are! What can you do about it?" he jeered. "The past is passing into the future, and we can distinctly see it happening. What if this clumsy lout lands you one!"

"He won't!" answered Davidov, dropping his arm. "As for your philosophy, it smacks very much of Ignatius Loyola. I hate it! Everything for our country! The Hussar is right! Break them, Tsioma! Smash 'em up! You have my blessing!"

Rayevsky laughed.

"Although, dear uncle, both of us have a hankering for guerilla warfare, my imagination is not nearly as wild as yours," he remarked.

"You, a guerilla?" asked Davidov in astonishment.

"Of course," answered Rayevsky. "Only of a type somewhat different from yourself. Recall that affair I had with the letter of Bagrattion's servant. And the other one with Count Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov, whom I publicly trounced. Oh, I am a real guerilla! And like you, I am hunted!"

"A nice lad you are, Alexander!" said Davidov in a reflective tone. "Whatever made you grow up like that? You and Peter Chaadayev? Both of you are still children, but you have a yellow face and he is bald. I am sorry for you, children! No, your guerilla warfare is not mine, nor mine yours. You have no field to operate in, and will have none. Count Mikhail Vorontsov will settle scores with you even if it takes him a decade. But I have a field. I have written to Prince Peter Ivanovich, and Olferyev has promised to hand my letter to him. Let's go to Alyosha!"

* * *

A candle under a paper shade was burning in a barn and the dim light of its fluttering flame sent weird shadows dancing on the log walls. Bagrattion had only just returned from a visit to Kutuzov. His talk with the Field Marshal had been a lengthy one, and had been conducted in the most even, mild and calmest of tones. How many questions they had discussed without heated debates, and settled in complete harmony! And all this had been interspersed with recollections and refined and clever talk about St. Petersburg, about Napoleon and his Marshals, about the slimy politicians of Berlin, and about the tawdry Austrian Generals.

What a clear head Mikhail Larionovich possessed! It was not suprising that Suvorov had said about him: "Even Ribas* cannot fool him!" Nevertheless, there had been something in that midnight conversation which now compelled Bagrattion to sit with his hands supporting his temples and his slender fingers entwined in his curly hair. Hard as it had been for Prince Peter to submit to Barclay, there had been something which had made it easy for him to do so: his conviction that he, Bagrattion, was right; the opportunity afforded to let off steam, to argue, to insist and demand on behalf of one hundred and fifty thousand men. True, later on this had changed. His confidence in himself had been shaken; arguments proved to be superfluous; his irascibility had subsided, and everything had been eclipsed by the hope of Kutuzov's speedy arrival. Already in Dorogobuzh Bagrattion had realized that Barclay had made no mistake in retreating; but he had no doubt that the retreat had reached its natural limit. Moscow could not be surrendered without a fight! What Russian heart could stand the mere thought of such a thing? And Barclay had not argued. Everything was got ready for battle. Bagrattion calmed down and waited. Kutuzov arrived. In Tsarevo-Zaimishche the Field Marshal himself, Barclay, and all the Generals talked about the battle as of something inevitable and as a foregone conclusion. Bennigsen was the only one to argue and to demand. And Kutuzov consented. Who knew Kutuzov better than he? And so, all Prince Peter Ivanovich's apprehensions had vanished. But since then a week had passed. A week of what? Of retreats. In a few hours' time the Army would strike camp again and retreat another twelve versts towards Moscow—to Borodino. What was happening?

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* O. M. de Ribas, a Russian Admiral, reputed for his cunning.

Before Bagrattion had been greatly incensed with what he had regarded as erroneous in Barclay's strategy, with Barclay himself, and with the latter's surrender of Smolensk. But that had been a conflict of opinions, characters and wills, the significance of which had been revealed in the course of debate. But what was the position now? It was so frightfully easy and simple to yield to Kutuzov. There was no stumbling block on this smooth road. There was nothing to argue about. Moscow must not be given up without a fight? Very well—we shall fight! Kutuzov had been quite definite about that. But behind that definiteness there was some unintelligible ulterior motive. Kutuzov had spoken more eagerly and with greater enthusiasm about saving Russia than about saving Moscow. Why? Russia breathed in her forests; she stretched across her hills and mountains and moved and lived in her vast rivers. But Moscow lay half crushed almost within sight of the enemy. Why then Russia and not Moscow?

Bagrattion was torn by doubt and perplexity. He had tried to solve the problem by bluntly asking Kutuzov what his intentions were, but Mikhail Larionovich had expressed such great surprise at the question that Prince Peter had blushed with confusion. He had tried to pump him by putting a sly question now and again, but what was his slyness compared with Kutuzov's cunning? And if the soft shell of words and hints were removed from events, the kernel, as hard as stone, would be revealed: ignoring the Tsar, Barclay and Bagrattion, bending everybody to his will, overriding everybody, Kutuzov was continuing to do what Barclay had done up to now, and was doing even what Barclay would never have attempted to do. Nothing was intelligible except that Moscow was in mortal danger. And this could not be combated—there was nothing tangible to combat.

Bagrattion's heart ached with cruel anxiety.

That morning Olferyev had handed Bagrattion Lieutenant-Colonel Davidov's letter, and he had discussed it with Kutuzov. Davidov's letter ran as follows:

"Prince! I was your aide-de-camp for five years and was always at your stirrup. You are my only benefactor. Hence, I am writing to you as I would to my own father. In our profession, Prince, only he performs his duty who fears not to step beyond its bounds, whose spirit does not merely keep in line, shoulder to shoulder with that of his comrades, but pleads for special duties, and never refuses a commission, however hazardous. Duty demands ardour, fearlessness and zeal, boldness in action and audacious thinking. But to whom am I saying all this? To you! But you are such a one already, whereas I, as yet, aspire to be one.

"My heart is weary from endless retreats. The enemy has already penetrated deep into Russia. Referring to myself, I will say: if I must perish, then let me die under the free standards of my country, even if they should flutter in the rear of the godless foe!

"The enemy is proceeding by a single road, but it is an extremely long one. The French food transports stretch from Smolensk to Gzhatsk, but to the south of this road stretches our broad and boundless Russia, which provides a convenient field for the operations of small detachments. In our rearguard there are numerous Cossacks, but we need only as many as are necessary to maintain our outposts. Would it not be better to divide the rest into small parties and send them among the baggage trains that are following in Bonaparte's rear? If our horsemen come into collision with strong French forces, they have sufficient space behind them to avoid defeat. But if they do not encounter such forces, they will destroy no small quantity of the supplies upon which the French Army depends: They will cut off its ammunition and capture its provisions. Our land is not so abundant that the narrow zone through which the French Army is passing can feed two hundred thousand French. But this is not all. The appearance of guerillas among the scattered inhabitants of the war zone will convert this war into a national war. . . ."

Davidov's ideas had seemed to Bagrattion to be worthy of consideration, and he had conveyed to Kutuzov the substance of the letter. Mikhail Larionovich had nodded approval but, as was always the case, had betrayed no interest in what Bagrattion deemed to be the most important part of Davidov's proposals. He appeared not to have noticed this most important part, namely, the prospect of constantly harassing the enemy's rear and thereby hindering the movements of the French Army, of weakening it before the battle and thereby facilitating victory. Kutuzov had not been impressed by these urgent tasks, but by something else.

". . . But to the south of the road which the French are following stretches our broad and boundless Russia," he had mused, repeating Davidov's words over and over again. "Sound, very sound! Who knows! Perhaps this guerilla warfare will be useful in the future. Meanwhile, Prince Peter, let us, indeed, send your Davidov into Bonaparte's rear by way of a trial!"

"Shall we send a large party, Your Excellency?" Bagrattion had asked.

"Oh no, no!" Kutuzov had answered. "The success of this undertaking is very, very doubtful, in my opinion. Give him half a hundred Hussars and about a hundred and fifty Cossacks. And see to it that he accompanies them himself!"

Again Bagrattion had failed to understand. What was there to be afraid of? Why put off to the future what could be useful for the present?

Prince Peter raised his head. "Very well!" he said. "In that case, I shall despatch Davidov with a party this very day, and keep this affair under my own observation. Hey, Alyosha! Go and look for Davidov and bring him here at once!"

"He is here, Your Excellency!" answered Olferyev.

On hearing that the Field Marshal had agreed with his proposals Davidov beamed with delight. But the offer of fifty Hussars and one hundred and fifty Cossacks disappointed him, and the expressed condition that he himself should accompany the party he regarded almost as an insult.

"I would be ashamed, Prince, to propose a dangerous undertaking and allow others to perform it," he said. "You know me. Am I not prepared for anything? But the number of men is too small."

"I agree, my heart!" said Bagrattion. "But what can I do. His Excellency will not give us more!"

"In that case, I shall go with these. Perhaps I shall prepare the way for a larger force," replied Davidov.

"That's exactly what I expect of you, Denis, my heart! Let me say between ourselves: I don't understand His Excellency! Fancy haggling over two or three hundred men, when tomorrow, if the operation is successful, Bonaparte will be deprived of his expected supplies and will be forced to put his men on a starvation ration! And if it is not successful, what is the loss of a hundred or two? War is not a flirtation. I would have detailed three thousand men for this first raid, for I hate groping in the dark. But I was unable to convince His Excellency."

Davidov gazed at Bagrattion with admiration.

"Believe me, Prince," he said in a confident tone. "My party will remain intact. The secret of success is: valour in attack, resoluteness in a tight corner, and unslumbering vigilance in bivouac. I willingly undertake this, and I lay my head that it will be successful!"

"Give me your hand, Denis, my heart!" exclaimed Bagrattion. "Do you feel how tightly I am gripping it? Now wait while I draw up your instructions."

Bagrattion sat down at the table and, inclining his head towards his right shoulder, began to write slowly on a sheet of paper. Davidov stood behind him, and also inclining his head, read the following uneven lines:

"To Lieutenant-Colonel Davidov, of the Akhtyrka Hussar Regiment.

"With this please receive from Major-General Karpov one hundred and fifty Cossacks and fifty troopers of the Akhtyrka Hussar Regiment. I hereby instruct you to take all measures to harass the enemy from the side of our left flank and to strive to capture his foragers not only from the flanks, but also from the centre and rear, to disorganize his supplies, break up river crossings and seize all accessories. I take this opportunity of expressing confidence that you, by your efficiency and zeal, will prove worthy of the important mission you have been charged with. Confirming the verbal instructions I have already given you, please report to me on all matters, but to no one else. Send reports at every opportunity. Nobody must know anything of your movements, and you must strive to maintain the strictest secrecy. As for provisioning your force—you must take care of that yourself.

General of Infantry, Prince Bagrattion

August 28, 1812.
In position."

After signing these instructions, Prince Peter Ivanovich fumbled among the papers on the table, found a map of the Smolensk Gubernia and handed it to Davidov.

"God speed, my heart!" he said, making the sign of the cross over Davidov. "And remember: I rely on you!"

* * *

General Vassilchikov had invited several Generals and Colonels to supper that night, and notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, the guests were in high revelry when Davidov burst into the tent.

"Larion Vassilyevich! Very urgent! Orders from Prince Peter Ivanovich!" he exclaimed.

Vassilchikov read the order and his ruddy cheeks drew up in an ironic smile.

"So you got round me!" he said. "I still insist, however, that your idea is all nonsense, my lad! Nonsense! Nonsense!"

Vassilchikov handed the order to the Generals. Clinking plates and glasses, the orderlies bustled around the table serving the guests. Behind a screen the fat cook in a white cap was puffing audibly and the popping of corks was heard. The Generals' faces were flushed and they had a vacant look in their eyes. After reading Bagrattion's order some of them shrugged their shoulders in silent perplexity, others tried to be witty.

"Here, Lieutenant-Colonel!" exclaimed Tuchkov, the commander of the 3rd Corps, with a vapid smile. "My brother Paul was taken prisoner by the French at Valutina Hill and is now, I hear, in Königsberg. Do me a favour and give him my greetings! Please don't forget!"

A roar of laughter greeted this sally.

"Nothing will come of this, Davidov!" said the Generals.

Davidov was deaf to all this raillery. Addressing Vassilchikov he pleaded:

"Give me Vorozheikin, General, I will choose the Hussars and Cossacks myself!"

"Take him by all means!" answered Vassilchikov. "And choose whichever men you please. I suppose you are set on capturing Bonaparte, aren't you?" Turning to the Generals he continued: "Were circumstances different Napoleon would not be the giant he is now and the terror of the world. He would simply have been a good and efficient officer, although very hard to get on with, like Davidov, here. . . . I wonder! Perhaps he too is aspiring to become a Bonaparte, gentlemen!"

This called forth another roar of merry laughter, but Denis was already out of the tent.

* * *

Early in the morning the armies started out on the march to Borodino. It was to be a short march, but a stiff one. The soldiers looked dejected and marched with drooping heads. The close proximity of Moscow caused their hearts to beat with anxiety. Every day, every hour, the French were pressing on the rearguard more fiercely and menacingly. Konovnitsin had been in action for three days and nights on end, and the cannonade in the rear had not ceased for a moment. The wounded trailed in the wake of the armies in crowds, and those unable to walk were carried in the ambulance carts,their legs and arms dangling from the sides and beating against the wheels. This scene depressed and frightened the men, and filled them with foreboding. The troops were becoming dispirited.

Davidov had collected his force, but was marching with the main body until it reached Borodino. On nearing Borodino, he—closely followed by Vorozheikin and Tsioma, who never left him for a moment, galloped forward to where Olferyev was riding in order to take leave of him. The two friends embraced and kissed, but went on talking, reluctant to part. Engrossed in their conversation, they dropped their reins and failed to notice that their horses had wandered from the road and were taking them through the scrub and over the hummocks of a wayside bog. Suddenly Davidov's horse started and leapt forward. A large grey hare sprang from under its forelegs and pressing its long ears back, swerved to the right, but came under the hoofs of Olferyev's horse. Terrified, it bolted in the direction of the troops marching along the road and on finding itself among the horses it lost its head. The soldiers hallooed and whistled as if at the chase. Many of them tried to catch the hare. The frightened animal darted this way and that, but failed to find a loophole of escape. A hue and cry was raised, first in one company, then in another, then in the regiment, and soon the whole division was in an uproar. For weary troops to engage in a hare hunt while on the march was indeed a strange and unprecedented occurrence.

In the midst of this wild scene, the Field Marshal, mounted on his white gelding, emerged from the trees on the roadside, followed by a large and brilliant suite. Mikhail Larionovich reigned in his horse and smilingly watched the fun the soldiers were having. The hare was very agile and would not surrender. Making a sudden swerve it eluded its pursuers, leapt from under the hundreds of hands reaching out on every side, and vanished in the field.

"Away she goes! Tally ho! Tally ho! A hunting we will go!" yelled the delighted soldiers.

Kutuzov no longer smiled. His fat, flabby body swaying on the flat back of his Mecklenburg, he held his sides and roared with laughter. This laughter was caught up by the nearby units. From there it rolled to the next unit, and the next, until the whole column rocked in merriment. "The boys in Rayevsky's Corps have set the old man laughing!" somebody remarked. The words flew down the line like an electric current and soon the entire Army was laughing. It was the spontaneous laughter of one hundred and thirty thousand men—the men in whom all Russia had placed her hopes! It was a free, hearty, devil-may-care laugh, and its deafening roar drowned the sounds of fighting in the rear and rolled on ahead, to be echoed and re-echoed in Borodino.

Davidov glanced at Olferyev. The Cornet's face was pale; a happy smile trembled on his lips and tears glistened on his eyelashes.

"Denis!" he whispered. "If Napoleon saw and heard this he would realize that he is doomed!"

* * *

After galloping with his party about twenty-five versts to the south of Borodino and reaching a clearing deep in the woods which led to the river, Davidov asked Tsioma:

"This morning, when the men were chasing the hare, you laughed louder than anybody else. I was afraid you were going to burst. What were you laughing at?"

Tsioma burst out laughing again and in between the chuckles exclaimed:

"The Field Marshal!"

"The Field Marshal laughed. . . . But what made you laugh?"

"What a man he is, your honour! It's a good job he has only one eye. If that man had two eyes—God save us!"

"Alyosha is right," said Davidov to himself. "Napoleon is doomed!" and rising in his stirrups he patted the Goliath of a Hussar on the cheek as if he were a child.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

The armies reached Borodino before midday and began to occupy the position. Here Kutuzov had decided to give battle. The considerations which had prompted him to do so were the following: His Army was inferior to the French in numbers, but it was superior in morale and in the zeal with which it looked forward to the forthcoming battle for Moscow. It was impossible to surrender the Capital without a trial of strength. The French were boasting that they were pursuing the Russians—they had to be taught to respect Russian arms. Moreover he—Kutuzov—had to win the Army's confidence. He had already done so to a large extent, but to avoid giving battle any longer would be asking for trouble. A battle was essential. True, he had scarcely any hope of routing Napoleon and hurling him back from Moscow. Even if the unexpected did happen the price of victory would be too high. If the losses on both sides were merely equal the French Army would remain numerically twice as strong as the Russian. On meeting with defeat Napoleon would retire, draw up his forces that were following in his rear and waiting on the Dvina, and soon launch another attack with forces three times larger than Kutuzov's. After defeating Napoleon and losing as many men as the latter, the Russian Army would possess only half its former strength. Under these circumstances it would have to retreat and surrender Moscow just the same. Consequently, a victory offered no great advantage. On the other hand, he had no doubt that his Army could not possibly be defeated, and the resistance it would offer the French at Borodino would be merciless and fierce. This was precisely what he wanted, and it was with this object in view that he decided to give battle, foreseeing heavy losses in men, and knowing beforehand that he would have to surrender Moscow. He placed his hopes mainly on the assistance he would receive from the winter and the National Militia. When Kutuzov and Bagrattion had talked about achieving victory over the French, both were convinced that this was inevitable. But by "victory" each meant different things. Prince Peter Ivanovich meant the direct and utter defeat of the French on the battlefield. Mikhail Larionovich meant offering the French such resistance as would make it impossible for them to compensate their losses on the battlefield even by the capture of Moscow. Bagrattion dreamed of annihilating the *Grande Armée* at one stroke. Kutuzov merely counted on irreparably breaking its offensive power, and put off its annihilation until the winter. They had not debated the point, because Kutuzov did not wish to reveal his plan. And Bagrattion, though sensing that something had been left unsaid, could not grasp what it was.

* * *

The First Army had its headquarters in the village of Gorki, from where a clear view could be obtained of the entire Borodino position: the hills and *kurgans** merging to the right of Gorki with the steep banks of the winding river Kolocha; the meadows and scrub stretching to the left up to the ravine, and the woods on the other side of the village of Semenovskoye. One glance at this terrain was sufficient to see that the right flank, covered by the Kolocha, was impregnable, whereas the left flank was open and vulnerable. In the centre of the position there was a fairly high mound, which was already being reinforced by a battery and rampart. Another *kurgan* jutted far in front of the left flank near the village of Shevardino. This village was torn down and a redoubt was built on the *kurgan*. The village of Borodino, like Shevardino, was also in front of the position and joined with it by a bridge across the darkly gleaming Kolocha. On the horizon beyond Borodino glinted the round cupola surmounting the tall belfry of the Kolocha Monastery.

The ridges of the hills and *kurgans* glittered with steel bayonets and bronze cannon, and the air resounded with the hum of thousands of voices and the neighing of horses. The regiments marched out to take their position in the line. The artillery were posted in the spaces between the regiments. The Army was formed in three lines—one of Chasseurs and two of infantry, but behind these there were the reserve units and the cavalry. Consequently, the front consisted of six or seven lines, reaching to a depth of no less than one verst. To pierce it would be no easy matter.

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* Ancient burial mound.

At midday, on August 23, Kutuzov, accompanied by Barclay, Tol and his suite, rode out from Gorki to inspect the position.

The left flank was occupied by Bagrattion's Second Army. Prince Peter Ivanovich had set up his headquarters in the village of Semenovskoye. He met the Field Marshal at the *kurgan* battery, which marked the beginning of his flank. Kutuzov rose in his stirrups and stretching his arms towards Bagrattion as a child does to an adult, pressed him to his breast and kissed him.

"So we have arrived, my dear Prince! Eh? We have arrived, haven't we?" he exclaimed in tones of delight. This question contained the answer that set all Bagrattion's doubts at rest. The Prince smiled joyfully.

"We have arrived, Your Excellency—to stay," he said. "We shall not go away from here so lightly!"

Kutuzov shook his head and said:

"Go away? Where to? Here shall we lay down our bones! We have nowhere to go!"

"We have nowhere to go!" he repeated, but to himself he said: "Prince Peter has not said much, but he has expressed all that fills the heart of every one of the many thousands of Russian soldiers gathered here. We have arrived! This is the thought that now animates their hearts. Prince Peter expresses the feelings of them all. But . . . he has failed to grasp the main thing!" The latter thought came into Kutuzov's mind because just at that moment Bagrattion, pointing rapidly to the heights on the right flank of the position and then to the left flank where the terrain was intersected by ravines, was saying excitedly:

"Be good enough, Your Excellency, to compare the prosperity of my neighbours with my poverty! Nature herself has made those positions impregnable. I, however, have neither a hill nor a hillock—it's all open field! It's hard to fight here. It is easy to guess what will happen. Bonaparte will hurl himself against the left flank. There lies the key to my position, waiting to be picked up!"

In uttering the last remark Bagrattion pointed to the broad, hard track of the old Smolensk Road, which skirted the left wing of his flank and led to Mozhaisk through the village of Utitsa.

"If the French pounce down upon Utitsa, I am done for, Your Excellency! From there, through the wood, it is only a short gunshot distance to Semenovskoye."

Kutuzov was perfectly well aware of this, and he had already thought of the measures to be taken to protect the left flank from the dangers which Bagrattion so clearly foresaw. But weren't there enough idle chatterboxes and rascals around? Kutuzov never liked to divulge his plans, and this plan, in particular, demanded secrecy. But Bagrattion was beginning to lose his composure.

"Your Highness has ordered my left wing to be moved from Shevardino to the other side of the ravine," he said. "Just now it is behind us, af we execute your order it will be in front of us. I make so bold, Your Excellency, as to suggest that this measure will cause twofold damage. Firstly, the central battery which General Rayevsky's Corps is to defend, will jut out at an angle from the line of the position and will therefore come under longitudinal artillery fire from the right and left. Secondly, the Shevardino redoubt, on which I am also placing troops, would become absolutely useless for defence, as I shall withdraw from it to a distance beyond gunshot range."

Kutuzov was aware of this too. He had already thought of the means of counter-balancing these drawbacks, and had counted and weighed the far more important advantages that would accrue from them. Take the Shevardino redoubt, for example. Bagrattion assumed that with the withdrawal of the left wing it would become superfluous and that, therefore, there was no need to fortify and defend it. But the Shevardino redoubt would be the only means of supporting the retreat of the rearguard when it begins to withdraw to the position. Konovnitsin was fighting like a lion, but the enemy's vast numbers were putting his courage and strength to the utmost strain. Soon he would be in full retreat, and then the Shevardino redoubt will be needed. Hence, Prince Peter was wrong. But he was losing his composure and had to be soothed. Kutuzov therefore said:

"All you say about your flank is quite right, my dear Prince, I am fully in agreement with you. Karl! Karl, where are you? Take my order! Fortify the Prince's left wing with redoubts, and for this purpose send additional men with tools. In front of that village—Semenovskoye isn't it?—erect *flèches* before nightfall. If we have no time to fortify the village—we shall remove it! Oh, Prince Peter! Theoretical sophistries are as widespread in our profession as quackery in medicine. We shall do it quite simply. We shall make clearings in the woods beyond your wing and thereby remove the danger of surprise attacks. We shall also push the reserves nearer to you. Do you hear that, Karl? Move the 5th Guards Corps, Prince Karl's Grenadier Division and the 3rd Infantry Division nearer to the Prince!"

Kutuzov spoke without pausing to think or to choose his words, but it was obvious that he was not speaking on the spur of the moment. It was something he had had in his mind all the time. Tol conveyed the orders to the quartermaster officers with astonishing promptitude.

"Is it clear?" he asked when he had finished.

"Yes, Colonel!"

"Repeat it!"

Alexander Rayevsky—who had only just been transferred to the Quartermaster's staff—Polchaninov and the other officers, repeated the orders and, wheeling their horses galloped off to the various positions. Tol's way of making the officers repeat the order pleased Kutuzov. It was a good method for avoiding mistakes or confusion. He beckoned to the Colonel and signed to his suite to retire a little distance.

"Karlusha!" he said. "By shifting the left wing of the Prince's troops to the other side of the hollow, we bring them nearer to the woods in which the clearings are to be cut. We shall occupy the woods with Chasseurs. But this is not the main thing. The main thing is to bring Tuchkov's 3rd

Infantry Corps to the left wing and place it in ambush to the rear of it, beyond the woods. When the French hurl their last reserves against Prince Peter we shall order Tuchkov to move his hidden troops to their flank and rear. In this way we shall save Prince Peter and the whole battle will at once turn in our favour. Do you understand me, Karl?"

"Yes, Your Excellency!" answered Tol.

Quick-witted as he was, he grasped the significance of Kutuzov's plan in an instant. "*Da ist der Hund begraben!*"* he thought to himself. "This will decide the outcome of the battle!" Removing his hat he bowed to the Field Marshal.

"You understand, don't you?" remarked Kutuzov smiling. "In that case—repeat it!"

Tol started at these last words. What! Repeat it? He was no common ensign, thank God!

"Oh, don't repeat it to me, or to anybody else, except Prince Peter!" Kutuzov hastened to add soothingly. "This matter demands extreme discreteness right up to the moment it is put into execution. You, I, and Prince Peter, and nobody else! And take particular care that Baron Bennigsen, my Chief of Staff, does not hear of it! Get that well into your head! But repeat it to Prince Peter, as if coming from yourself, as a mark of your unselfish devotion. Perhaps, as a colleague in a most important matter, he will pardon you for your rudeness at Dorogobuzh. The sword cannot sever a repentant head!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Konovnitsin's rearguard held on to the very last. The guns roared on the other side of the Kolocha Monastery all through the night of August 23rd and in the morning of the 24th; and it was not until midday of the 24th that General Sievers' rearguard cavalry broke out of the inferno and made a dash for the Borodino position, bringing the enemy close on his heels all the way from Elnya. Sievers' retreat was more hurried than was desired, but he was unable to withstand the onslaught of the vast hordes of French troops which were assailing him on all sides. Nearly all that day Kutuzov and Bagrattion stood on the left flank under heavy fire watching the retreat. Cannon-balls shrieked and hissed over their heads, their horses swerved and snorted, but Prince Peter Ivanovich kept his eyes glued on the battlefield. The haste with which Sievers was leading his Dragoons away made him furious. The earthworks on the left flank were not yet completed; the village of Semenovskoye had not yet been pulled down, and the necessary *flèches* had not yet been erected, but the battle already threatened to sweep this way, and precisely on to his left flank! All Sievers' manoeuvres could be discerned through the smoke rolling over the field. He was now leading his troops into the zone of fire of the Shevardino redoubt.

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* So that's what's at the back of it!

In ten or fifteen minutes he would lead them out again, and then the French would enter it.

"Alyosha!" shouted Bagrattion. "Gallop to the redoubt, to Gorchakov. Tell him to keep his eyes open! The French will be within range of the redoubt within ten minutes! All guns to be loaded with grapeshot! Slash them in the face!"

Olferyev was off like a shot, his horse's tail disappearing in a column of dust.

"That's splendid, Prince Peter!" said Kutuzov appreciatively. "Very sound, my General! But how would you have been able to slash the French in the face if we had not the Shevardino redoubt for defence? So the redoubt has proved to be useful after all! Still, your order is sound, very sound!"

The same thing happened now as had happened on more than one occasion before—in eighteen hundred and five. In a situation in which any other General would have lost his head ideas came to Bagrattion like a flash of inspiration. The more difficult and hopeless a position seemed, the brighter and hotter became these mighty flashes. The order that Olferyev was to convey to Prince Gorchakov, the commander of the redoubt, would save Sievers from mortal danger at one stroke and hold the battle a long way from the left flank. Consequently, work could continue on the fortifications. Napoleon, too, was noted for brilliant flashes of genius in the midst of a battle, but Napoleon possessed still another power: farsighted general calculation, which boldly and confidently predetermined success. On the left flank two Russian commanders stood side by side—one was equal to Bonaparte in brilliant flashes of genius, the other in depth and range of vision.

The French advanced on Shevardino. The rattle of musketry fire crept nearer and spread along the line. Clouds of black smoke enveloped the redoubt. Suddenly the earth trembled, clouds flew upwards and a ring of fire encircled the Shevardino fortifications. A salvo rang out, a second, and a third. . . . The French dashed forward to attack the redoubt. Gorchakov met them with grapeshot.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Bagrattion.

"And later on, when the turmoil on your left flank ceases," said Kutuzov, turning his horse with the intention of leaving, "when the *flèches* are completed and the troops retire to the other side of the ravine, I will ask you, Prince Peter, to recall Gorchakov from Shevardino. Then, indeed, shall we need that hillock no longer."

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The fifteen hundred versts of continuous retreat was making itself felt. The battle of Shevardino was fierce and stubborn. The chill of night already lay on the earth; clouds sped across the sky, leaving it clear one moment and overcast another. Several times Bagrattion sent aides-de-camp to the redoubt with orders to Gorchakov to withdraw his troops, but the battle raged on. The 2nd Cuirassier Division was sustaining heavy losses in constant counter-attacks. This was quite superfluous, and the fact that the cannonade continued and that every now and again the darkness of the night was pierced by flashes of gunfire began to irritate Bagrattion. He sent Gorchakov still another message: "Withdraw, Prince, I command you!" adding something in more vigorous terms to be conveyed by word of mouth. This time the message proved effective. The menacing roar of the guns on the Shevardino redoubt subsided. It became quieter on the French side too. The villages situated within the enemy's line were ablaze and thousands of campfires flickered in the night. In Borodino, the squire's mansion was burning to the ground. An unbroken sheet of flame stretched across the field of Borodino as far as the eye could reach. The troops on the left flank stacked their arms, lit fires and began to cook their *kasha*. Bagrattion retired to take his supper.

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The concluding salvoes of the battle of Shevardino still rang out from time to time between the redoubts and the *flèches*. In a smoke-blackened peasant hut in the village of Semenovskoye, Bagrattion and Saint-Priest were seated at supper. Prince Peter Ivanovich's camp table was noted for the abundant and solid food it provided, and the exquisite skill with which it was prepared. As a rule, the hospitable host was merry at table, politely persistent in regaling his guests, and amiable and unassuming in his bearing. A spirit of benevolence, captivating in its charm, descended upon him on such occasions, and he became pleasantly loquacious. His stock of stories about the innumerable campaigns he had fought in the Caucasus, in Poland, in Germany and in Turkey was positively inexhaustible. Even guests for whom he had no particular regard or sympathy could not complain of the Prince's treatment when they shared his dinner or supper. Therefore, although Prince Peter disliked Saint-Priest, the "*flyaki à la hospodar*"* and the roast leg-of-mutton removed all likelihood of discord arising between host and guest.

"I love to fight your countrymen, the French, Colonel!" said Bagrattion, with just a faint suspicion of a sting in his voice, however. "There's some credit in beating a foe like that. Never since the world began have soldiers fought like the Russians and the French! Suvorov once said to me—I shall never forget it as long as I live: 'Easy victories do not rejoice the Russian's heart!' And the French never sell victories cheaply."

"I, too, have had occasion to encounter French troops when fighting in the ranks of my new countrymen," answered Saint-Priest. "As far as I can judge, they are like incendiary rockets: if they don't strike at once they fizzle out. Still, the French possess many excellent qualities which are worthy of emulation."

"Manoeuvring is their strong point," rejoined Bagrattion. "I am not averse to learning from the French, by God! But I have not forgotten my own teachers. Tsar Peter, Suvorov, our present Field Marshal—these represent the Russian school! Everything is based on manoeuvres: Sometimes we advance, sometimes we retreat—but we always achieve victory! I am one of Suvorov's pupils. I retreated across the Alps. And while under

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* Boiled tripe.

Kutuzov I went into attack many a time. Manoeuvring is a great thing. A commander plans, the soldier understands—and the thing is done: glory to the victor! And the soldiers! What soldiers we have! Nothing like them in all the world! But you know that yourself, Count!"

The door of the hut was flung open and Gorchakov, Count Mikhail Vorontsov and Neverovsky—the three Generals who were defending Shevardino—entered the room. The faces of all three were grimy with gunpowder smoke, and all three were panting. Gorchakov's greatcoat was scorched in three places, and Vorontsov's had both skirts torn off. The Generals were covered from head to foot with dust.

"Welcome, friends!" Bagrattion greeted them joyously. "You peppered those Frenchmen magnificently! By God, it was fine! Don't keep us in suspense, Prince Andrei, tell us all about it! Sit down, sit down! Three more covers, there! Lively now! Well, Prince, tell us all about it!"

"Your Highness was angry because I was unable to withdraw from Shevardino at your first word of command," said Suvorov's nephew, puffing and sniffing the fragrance of the roast mutton. "Nobody else in my place could have done so! Do me a favour and ask the Count, or Neverovsky. They will tell you the same, although we have not agreed among each other what to say, I assure you."

With that he threw off his greatcoat, tucked up his sleeves and picked up his knife and fork. A carnivorous glint lit up his sleepy eyes.

"I am so hungry that I feel as if tarantasses are riding about in my belly!" he continued. "But how could I withdraw? It was impossible! At about four o'clock the French tried to get at us. From five to seven—the guns talked. And then—attack after attack. The battery changed masters four times. They captured three of our guns, but we captured six of theirs. I realized myself that it was time to leave, that it was no use playing the game to the very end; but my feet seemed to be weighted with lead. And the soldiers wouldn't budge—not if you flogged them! I barely got away by the skin of my teeth."

"The whole of Poniatowski's Corps, all Murat's cavalry and Davout's three divisions attacked us, Your Highness," Neverovsky interjected. "Three times I drove out their 61st Regiment of the line with the bayonet."

"I don't know whether anybody will thank us, but the French will certainly not be grateful," observed Vorontsov with cold irony. "Prince Andrei Ivanovich had already yielded the redoubt, but my Grenadiers couldn't be restrained and charged Morand's Division again. Oh, what a glorious scrap that was!"

"And what about the trick I pulled off, gentlemen?" said Gorchakov laughing and vigorously chewing the mutton. "Compagne marched a column to attack. I ordered the Cuirassiers to meet them, but they needed five minutes to muster. I looked round and saw Murat with his ironsides making for the place between the redoubt and the village. 'There goes my five minutes!' I thought to myself. Just enough time for them to break through! What's to be done? I couldn't for the life of me think of anything. Meanwhile, the precious minutes were flying. Suddenly an idea struck me. I banged myself on the forehead and said to myself: Ah, you mutton head! That

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is—calf's head! But it's all the same! I drew a battalion from the reserves and led them out without a shot, without the beat of a drum—only a cheer, as loud as the men could shout. It was already dark. Judging by the cheer the French thought that it was not a battalion but a whole corps charging at them! Murat got cold feet and wavered. Just then my Cuirassiers charged down on 'em and nabbed four of their guns! That's the Suvorov way! What?"

With that he raised his head and looked round proudly at the Generals, meanwhile munching his food and smacking his thick greasy lips with relish.

"My late uncle often praised our present Field Marshal for his military astuteness," he continued. "I was a boy then, but I remember he used to say: 'Oh, he's cunning, cunning! Shrewd, shrewd! Nobody can fool him!' Today, I, too, pulled off a trick!"

"Don't boast, Prince Andrei!" said Bagrattion, interrupting Gorchakov with some asperity. "Let praise come from others! As for what Suvorov said about Mikhail Larionovich—that's true. But he praised him not for ruses such as these, but for much shrewder ones. . . . The entire defence of Shevardino was a cunning military ruse of great tactical significance. . . ."

While uttering these words Bagrattion involuntarily recalled what Tol had related to him the preceding day about Kutuzov's plan for an ambush on the other side of the Utitsa Wood. This, too, was "a cunning military ruse of tactical significance," and, moreover, one that was matchless as regards the consequences with which they were fraught. But about that . . . mum's the word!

"His Highness is a past master in the art of deceiving the enemy," said Saint-Priest suddenly. "He has decided to put Tuchkov's 3rd Corps in ambush behind us. I wonder what will come of it? But success promises. . . ."

But he did not finish what he wanted to say. Bagrattion's eyes flashed angrily. What did this mean? Only Kutuzov, he and Tol were in the secret. How did Saint-Priest obtain possession of it? Oh, the damned spy! His former suspicions flared up like a burning haystack. He grasped the corner of the table-cloth, crushed it in his fist and tugged it so hard that the plates on the table rattled and the mutton sauce was upset.

"Who informed Your Excellency about the Field Marshal's plans?" he enquired in a voice of suppressed passion.

Saint-Priest blushed with confusion. He was aware of the fits of passion that Bagrattion was subject to, and he was also aware that they were usually called forth by his own—Saint-Priest's—indiscretion, but where he had been indiscreet just now he could not imagine. He shrugged his shoulders in perplexity and looked round at the other guests. Vorontsov smiled encouragingly and said to Bagrattion:

"But, Your Highness, everybody knows about it! I, too, know about it."

"And I, and I," chimed in Gorchakov and Neverovsky. "All the quartermaster ensigns know!"

"Treachery!" exclaimed Prince Peter.

"If this is treachery," continued Vorontsov, "then I can name one of the principal traitors. It is Ensign Alexander Rayevsky. I got the rumour from him. He has just been transferred to the Quartermaster Staff. This is not the first time he has talked too much."

Having said this, he thought to himself: "I have settled scores with that insolent puppy!" And he smiled so coldly and angrily that for a moment his handsome face became terrible to behold.

At this juncture the voice of Prince Kantakuzen was heard coming from the threshold. The Colonel had arrived long ago and had stood unobserved listening to the heated conversation with keen interest.

"Gentlemen," he said, "if my low rank does not put a seal upon my lips, I will take the liberty to put in a word or two. Where is the treachery, Prince Peter Ivanovich? For God's sake tell me, Your Highness! Ensign Polchaninov, our Divisional Quartermaster, came to me today and informed me of this with tears of joy and hope in his eyes. Everybody knows about it. Absolutely everybody. Even some of the sergeants are in the secret. The only one who appears to be ignorant of it is the Chief of the General Staff, Baron Bennigsen!"

Prince Grigory Matveyevich laughed so heartily that it was impossible to resist it. Saint-Priest shook Vorontsov's hand. Bagrattion said slowly:

"God knows how this happened! Those who have a hand in it will soon be facing the judgement of God. It is impossible to gag quartermaster ensigns. But Tol will not escape the knapsack, I swear he will not!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Work on the fortification of the left wing was continued even on the day after the battle of Shevardino, that is, on August the 25th. By evening the village of Semenovskoye no longer existed; in its place stood a battery of twenty-four guns. The three small entrenchments in front of the village had been transformed into large *flèches*, and the Utitsa Woods were protected by clearings. Work was conducted also on that part of the position where the left flank joined the centre. On the *kurgan* jutting about five hundred and eighty yards from the front between the right wing of the 7th Corps and the left wing of the 6th, a "central" battery was being erected. As General Rayevsky's 7th Corps had been appointed to defend this battery, it began to be called "Rayevsky's Battery." Large numbers of bearded men in dark grey coats and hats of the same colour ornamented by bronze crosses, zealously lugged to this place sacks full of earth, built a low rampart around the *kurgan*, and levelled the ground for an emplacement for fifty guns. These were the Moscow Militia. Dusk set in, but the work on Rayevsky's Battery was still unfinished, and it was obvious that there would be no time to complete it. It was still necessary to deepen the moat, smooth the slopes, level the rampart and provide the embrasures with tours and fascines. Meanwhile, the artillery rode out to the battery and took up their positions.

At a side embrasure stood a young man of short stature wearing the uniform of an officer of the Moscow Militia. His face, as yellow as a Turk's, his broad, angular almost square forehead, and his bulging, coffee-coloured eyes were serene and thoughtful. He slowly fingered the pages of a leather-bound notebook and moved his full lips soundlessly. He gazed at the bearded militiamen toiling feverishly around him and at the guns as they came rattling along, but it is doubtful whether he saw anything. And he also failed to notice Travin striding rapidly towards him.

"How do you do, my dear Zhukovski!" exclaimed the Lieutenant. "I can't get used to you in your semi-military attire, and never will. But what tricks fate plays with us! We had not met for ten years. Since we were at the Moscow Gentlemen's Boarding School. But now we meet twice every day. What are you doing here? Your warriors are earning their bread by the sweat of their brow; but what about you? Why not take up a spade . . . ."

Zhukovski woke up out of his reverie. His face lit up with a pleasant smile.

"What can I do with a spade?" he asked. "That's no job for me! I'll tell you a secret, Travin. I shall be taken to General Headquarters in a day or two to act as the Field Marshal's clerk. Now that's the job for me! Just now I was engrossed in dreams that might be called poetical. I would like to call it 'A Bard in the Russian Camp.' I have already composed a verse about His Highness. Listen!"

Zhukovski raised his serene, clear eyes to the cold darkening sky and making a wide sweep with his right arm he recited in a restrained, resonant, but velvety voice, the following lines:

To thee all praise our brave captain,
Our hoary-headed hero!
Like a youthful warrior, in sun or rain
You're with us in weal or woe.

"Fine!" exclaimed Travin approvingly. "Mainly because it is true. For whom else are you weaving a laurel crown?"

"I have one ready for Rayevsky. As I was standing here on this battery just before you came, the vision of that gallant commander rose before my eyes as he was leading his two sons into battle at Saltanovka. Here are the lines:

To Rayevsky, hero of our day
All praise! The first with his brave sons
To hurl himself into the fray —
Upon the enemy's guns,
The onslaught of the foe to stay.

"And these on Platov:

To thee, Ataman, swift as the wind,
All praise! Platov, leader of the invincibles,
Whose charmed lasso oft doth wind
Around the necks of accursed infidels.

"An almanac of Russian military glory, I see," said Travin laughing. "Splendid! You are distributing laurel wreaths, but our country is silent."

Zhukovski drew himself up and shook his head.

"Oh, no!" he protested. "Here is the first voice. Listen!

Leaders of the Slavs, all honour
and praise!
Complete the extermination!
Our land to us for vengeance
cries,
The world cries for salvation!

"That too is fine," said Travin quietly. "It speaks straight to the Russian heart. But the Russian heart, to which you are singing, is first of all a soldier's heart. Have you forgotten the most industrious labourer in the harvest-time of war—the common soldier?"

"I have been wearing the uniform for less than two weeks. I don't know the common soldier," answered the poet blushing.

"You don't know him. It is not surprising. Not every military man can get to know him. What an amazing creature the Russian soldier is! Those who see him only on parade or who judge him only by the way he stands to attention in front of an officer will never know what he is even if they serve with him all their lives. No. But you, brother Zhukovski, sleep with him on the same plank bed in the guardroom, be with him at the look-out post under fire for nights on end, charge with him under grapeshot or be jolted with him in the ambulance cart, and then you will know what the Russian soldier is! Come, I will show him to you!"

Zhukovski obediently followed Travin to where the latter's battery stood. The men were busy about the guns, loosening the charges in the barrels, cleaning the touch-holes and hauling away the reserve gun carriages and ammunition carts. Ugodnikov was showing the men how to fire grapeshot against advancing cavalry without the aid of diopters. He stooped, shouted something and lifted the guide bar, his face turning red with the strain.

"For speed, look through the back sight and down the barrel and swing it. Like this! Like this!" And suiting the action to the word he swung the gun carriage to the right and left.

"Ugodnikov!" shouted Travin. "Not all the men are as strong as you. One needs extraordinary strength to fling a gun carriage about like that, you woodman!"

"Not at all, your honour!" answered Ugodnikov smiling, but panting from his efforts, nevertheless. "It's not as heavy as it looks. Anybody can do it in the excitement of battle!"

"Is that so, brothers?" asked Travin, addressing the other men.

"We'll manage it, your honour!" the men answered in chorus.

Travin proudly glanced at Zhukovski. Just then two horsemen in Generals' uniforms came galloping to the battery. They were Bagrattion on an English chestnut mare, and Kutaissov on a white Arab steed. The horses snorted, bared their teeth and wildly rolled their flashing eyes.

The Generals dismounted. Their orderlies, with the agility acquired by habit, unrolled a brightly coloured Persian carpet on the black earth and placed chairs upon it. Before the visitors managed to sit down soldiers and officers came running to the carpet from all sides, removing their shakos and caps as they ran.

"I have had no dinner today," said Kutaissov. "I shall go straight from here to Yermolov for supper."

"We find a home and a table everywhere," said Bagrattion laughing. "Friends, tea!"

The orderlies bustled around for a little while and soon a large smoky teapot without a spout appeared and pewter cups were steaming. The artillerymen crowded closely round the carpet.

"Friends!" said Bagrattion. "Live a century—learn a century. I and the Count, our commander of artillery, have had a long confab and we have come to a certain conclusion. It is regarded as a mortal sin for a battery commander to lose his guns. But is that right? Supposing the guns are lost, but not in vain?"

Bagrattion scanned the faces of the crowd and smiled. Many of the officers gazed at him in astonishment. Indeed, in the eyes of Russian artillerymen no disgrace could be greater nor misfortune heavier than the loss of their guns. And probably there was not a single battery commander who would not, when enemy cavalry were within two hundred yards of him, grab hold of the limbers and leave his position in order to drag the guns to safety. No wonder Bagrattion's question amazed them.

"Let us suppose that you are being attacked by cavalry . . . making straight for the guns," continued the General. "What ought you to do? Retire? God save us, no! However close they may be, there may still be time to give them two and perhaps even three salvoes. And those grapeshot salvoes will be more deadly than ten at any other time!"

His auditors' astonishment increased. Kutaissov tossed his head and said:

"Who knows what will happen to any or all of us tomorrow, my friends? So take this, my last command: Not a step from the position until the enemy is already astride your guns! Stand fast until he is within the shortest possible grapeshot range. The artillery must sacrifice itself. It's a bad business to lose one's guns, but if the position is saved thereby, the sin is forgiven!"

Travin fully appreciated the importance of what the Generals were urging so persistently, but his men's blind attachment to their guns was no less important. This had to be expressed somehow; but how? He caught sight of gunner Ugodnikov's despairing face. He straightened his sash and stepping forward said:

"Your Excellency! Orders must not be questioned. They must be obeyed, for good or ill. Nothing can be simpler: If the French press hard—limbers and boxes off and fire point-blank with grapeshot! In the last resort, the men are to retire, but leave the guns. . . ."

"That's right, my heart!" rejoined Bagrattion in confirmation.

Travin pointed his fingerless hand to Ugodnikov and said:

"This is the best gunner in my company, Your Excellency! See, he is weeping!"

Large tears were, in fact, slowly rolling down the soldier's pale cheeks into his thick black side whiskers.

"But he rushes to meet death with a smile on his lips!" continued Travin. "That shows that he values the guns more than his life. We shall leave the guns. But, Your Excellency, the infantry must retrieve them! It is harder to lose the guns than to recapture them!"

Bagrattion jumped from his seat, strode rapidly towards Travin and embraced him.

"My dear Lieutenant! You are brave and bold to give Generals advice. But Russian Generals are brave enough to say: Thank you for good advice. Whenever the infantry sees that the artillery are retiring and abandoning the guns, they must immediately rush into the fray! Let's go to Rayevsky, Count Alexander, to make the necessary arrangements so that the men, knowing their duties, may be at their ease. As for Yermolov's supper, it looks as though he will have to eat it without you."

* * *

Zhukovski walked along the positions towards the left flank at the extreme end of which, two versts from where Prince Karl Mecklenburg's Grenadier Division was posted, stood the Moscow Militia. The poet was delighted with the opportunity he had had of seeing Bagrattion in person and at close quarters. The "Bard in the Russian Camp" regretted that he had not yet composed a verse dedicated to Prince Peter Ivanovich, but try as he would, he had failed so far to record his impressions of him in solemn and sonorous numbers. He had found no difficulty in describing the vivid and imposing images of Kutuzov, Rayevsky, Platov and Konovnitsin, but he had found Bagrattion extremely difficult to portray. "Is he not so elusive because his gigantic soldier's spirit lies concealed within his mortal body," he asked himself with sadness and regret. "I do not know the Russian soldier. . . . And Travin says that one must learn a great deal before one can know him." The poet stumbled over pitfalls and ditches and wandered in the scrub, going round gulleys and hollows, totally oblivious to what was going on around him. Meanwhile the Russian Army was preparing for battle. The infantry were cleaning their muskets and substituting new flints for old. The cavalry examined the saddle girths of their horses and sharpened their sabres. The artillery strengthened the traces of the guns, greased the gun wheels, prepared matches and filled their ammunition carts. There was considerable bustle all around, but scarcely a word was uttered. Swift and precise action needed no words. Everything seemed to be moving automatically. At last Zhukovski reached the Grenadiers' camp, which was situated in a young birch copse, within easy distance of the Militia camp. At this moment the poet was overtaken by a droshky in which a tall, thin, grey-haired General wearing an enormous hat with a multicoloured plume was riding. On reaching the first vedette the General ordered his driver to stop and beckoned to the soldier.

"Whose guard is this?" he enquired in a loud and distinct voice, but with a foreign accent.

An officer appeared from the scrub and on recognizing Baron Bennigsen, Chief of the General Staff, drew up to attention and reported:

"The 2nd Grenadier Division, Your Excellency!"

Bennigsen slowly alighted from the droshky, rattling his sword and spurs as he did so. He stood for several minutes carefully examining the place. His thin lips moved visibly although he uttered not a sound. There was something in what he saw that displeased him very much, so much so that he shrugged his shoulders in disgust two or three times.

"Whose Brigade is this?" he demanded.

"Colonel Prince Kantakuzen's," he was told.

"Send for the Colonel, Mr. Officer!"

Soon the dark, compact figure of Prince Grigory Matveyevich appeared at a leisurely pace in answer to the General's summons.

"Who placed you here, Colonel?" enquired the General.

"The Quartermaster-Officer, on the orders of the Quartermaster-General, Your Excellency!"

"Why does Colonel Tol do such stupid things!" angrily exclaimed Bennigsen, and taking Kantakuzen by the elbow turned him this way and that. "Why don't you protest when you see that stupid things are being done with you?" he continued. "Your Brigade has been placed here to be slaughtered, don't you see that? You are Prince Bagrattion's left wing. But look: the gap between you and General Tuchkov's 3rd Corps is so wide that the enemy will certainly hurl himself into it tomorrow. He will begin with that."

Kantakuzen understood Bennigsen's perplexity. The Chief of the General Staff was unaware of Kutuzov's plan for an ambush. The Field Marshal's secret had been well kept from him. This explained why the conversation took such a humorous turn.

"I cannot tell how the French will start tomorrow, Your Excellency," answered Kantakuzen trying to conceal a smile in his side whiskers. "But my duty is to obey orders."

"How stupid this Colonel is!" thought Bennigsen to himself.

"Your duty! Your duty!" he repeated mockingly. "But it is also your duty to save your unit from certain annihilation, and to do that you must have some gumption and imagination!"

Prince Grigory Matveyevich flared up and said:

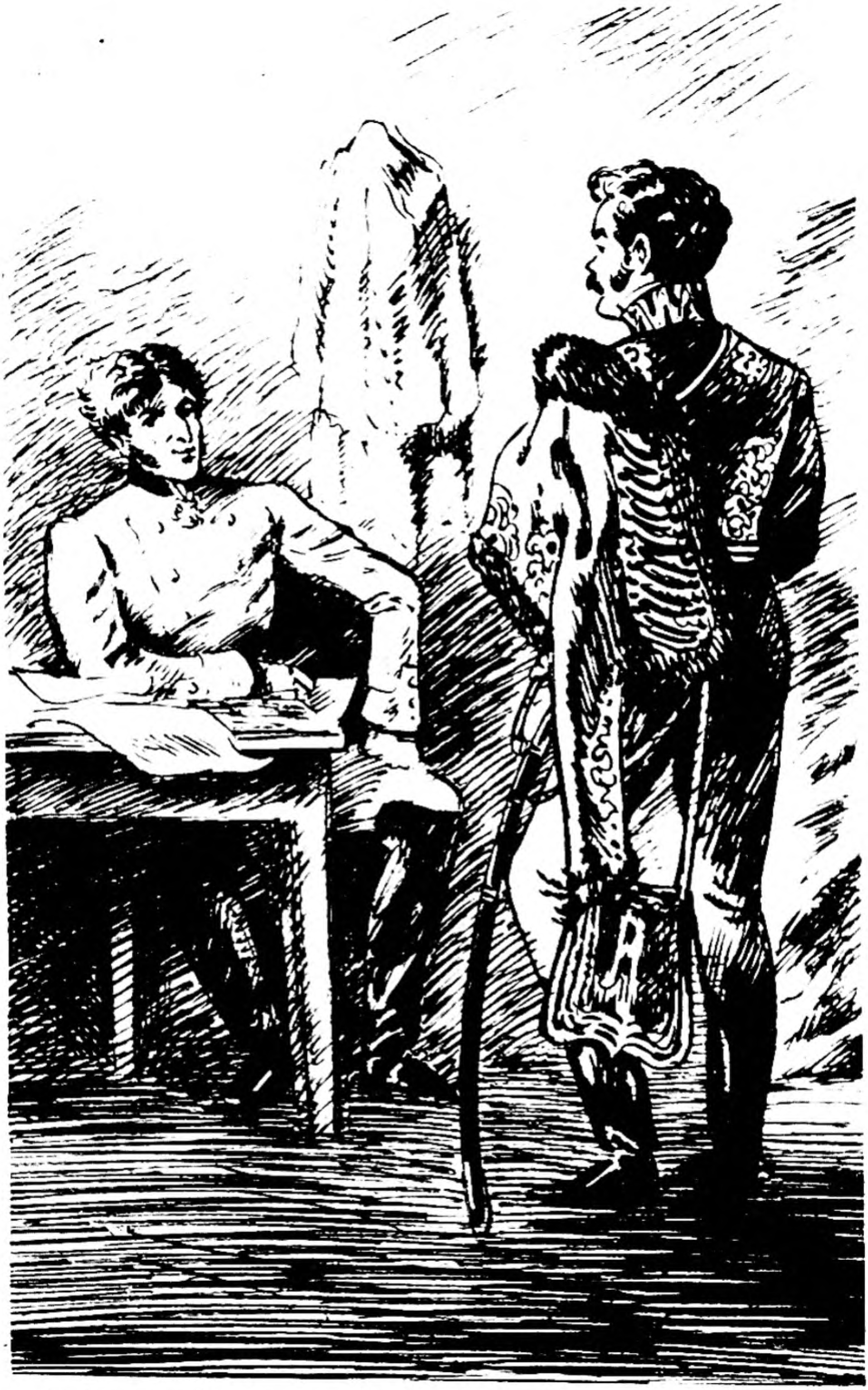
"I have more gumption than Your Excellency evidently imagines!"

Bennigsen too flared up. His eyes flashed.

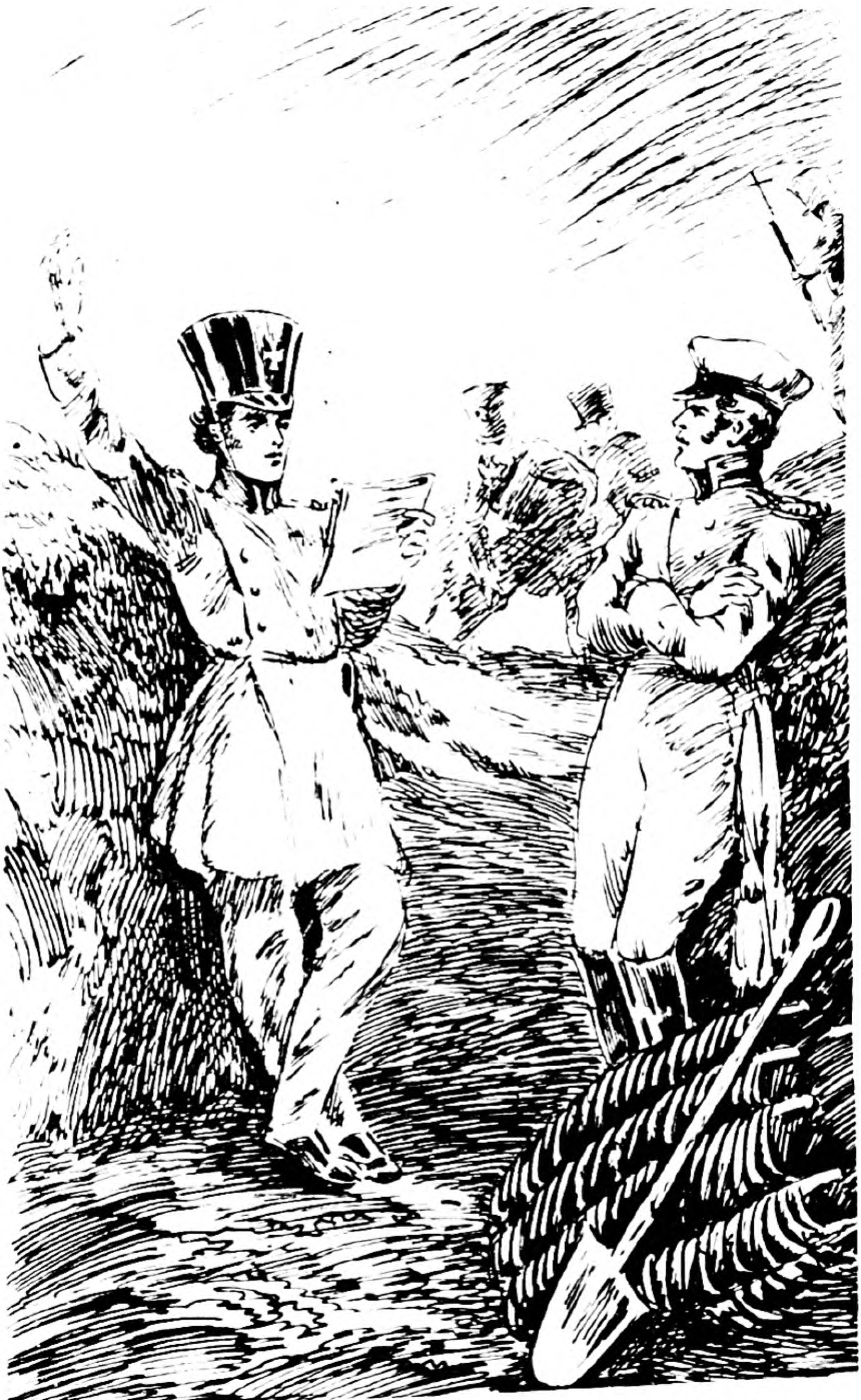
"Silence, Colonel!" he said sternly, licking his lips. "I know men who are so thick-headed that they could break down walls with their skulls. But you are voluntarily placing your miserable skull under a wall that is about to collapse upon you. I have never yet met such brave . . . idiots!" With that he sprang into the droshky and rode off, his bony knees pointing upwards in two sharp angles.

* * *

The strange dislike of the troops had pursued Bennigsen from the moment he appeared in the Army to the present day. The soldiers barely answered his greetings, and the officers met him with an unfriendly stare. What was the cause of this? Why did they not behave like this when Kutuzov smilingly rode up to the troops? One could understand the men and officers



Davidov was pleased to hear that the Field Marshal agreed with his proposal



"Zhukovski, making a wide sweep with his right arm, recited"

disliking Barclay. One could also understand their enthusiasm for Bagrattion. But their blind worship of that decrepit but sly Field Marshal and their undisguised dislike of Bennigsen were totally inexplicable. The atmosphere of sullen hostility which the Baron felt around him pained and irritated him. Had he not led Russian Armies to victories over Bonaparte? Pultusk and Preussisch-Eylau were not Austerlitz! There were many people in Europe who were of the opinion that there were only two commanders who were complete masters of the art of war: Napoleon and he. Consequently, the cause could not be their distrust of his military skill. But what was the cause of this unfortunate situation? It could be explained only by Kutuzov's intrigues. But every action must have an equal counter-action; the life of matter was based on this principle of physics. Why should the spirit and ethics be excluded from this general rule? It should not be excluded! Intrigue must be countered by intrigue. "I will write to the Emperor," thought Bennigsen to himself. "No lies or slander. Not at all! It will be sufficient to relate how the troops were disposed on the left flank to make His Excellency's senile marasmus float on the surface of these decisive days like an empty bottle on the water. And also how efficiently and skilfully I rectify his unpardonable blunders."

General Tuchkov met the Chief of the General Staff in the middle of his camp with a gloomy and dissatisfied visage.

"My General," said Bennigsen to him. "Please move your troops out of the wood immediately, and place them as closely as possible to tho extreme end of the left flank."

"But why should I do that, Your Excellency? I am quite comfortable here," answered the commander of the lst Corps.

The same thing over again! All Bennigsen's attempts, so natural in his position, to intervene in the spontaneous course of affairs and to direct them into the channel of common sense and reason encountered blind and obstinate resistance. This time he would not be thwarted, however.

"If I tell you that you must shift your troops, General, I know what I am talking about," he said. "I want to remind you that my orders are binding upon you!"

Tuchkov awkwardly stepped from one foot to another. A grimace that looked like a suppressed yawn passed over his rugged face.

"Your Excellency is aware that this is not the first day that I am in the Imperial Russian service," he answered calmly. "It is too late to begin teaching me, Your Excellency. As far as I can see, if I shift my troops nothing can come of it but harm. It is your pleasure that I should move to the slope of the hill that separates the wood from the left flank; but it is easy to see, Baron, that in exposing myself in this way I shall be mercilessly attacked. . . ."

Again Bennigsen sensed that there was something left unsaid in the General's objections. The last thing that Tuchkov feared, of course, was the French artillery, but what was he afraid of? A wave of anger overcame Bennigsen. This happened to him very rarely, but as is usually the case with people who are restrained and outwardly cold and calm, when such fits did attack him they shook every fibre of his being. At such frightful moments he felt numb at the knees, his throat contracted as if squeezed by an iron collar, his eyes were dazzled by invisible flashes of fury. He ceased to breathe and became oblivious to everything except his rage. Once, during the war of 1807, he lost consciousness in a fit of rage like this—he swooned like the most gentle of young ladies. He was on the verge of doing the same now.

He wanted to stamp his foot, but the earth seemed to slip from under it. He wanted to roar, but instead he emitted a hoarse gasp:

"Lead your troops out forthwith. . . . I. . . ."

Tuchkov saluted, turned on his heel and said to his Quartermaster:

"Lead the Division to the left flank, brother. I wash my hands of the whole business!"

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Everybody knows that the most crowded corner is the cosiest corner for a soldier. Gradually, almost the entire Carabineers' Company gathered round Sergeant Brezgun's fire. The Grenadiers came up one by one, lit their pipes, and leisurely joined in the conversation.

"Our thoughts are away over the hills, but death looks over our shoulders," said someone with a sigh.

"Drop that, Kukushkin!" said the Sergeant sternly. "Let's have none of that before the battle!"

"But I feel afraid, Ivan Ivanovich!" replied Kukushkin.

"Afraid! Well, what of it?" answered the Sergeant scornfully. "Sometimes you feel afraid on outpost duty, but you manage to keep your pecker up and it passes off. Suppose you are afraid, what of it?"

"If we're not killed we shall see!" said Tregulyaev with a gravity most unusual for him. "Look how many of us are here! And from how many parts of the country! Kukushkin, you're from Tver I think, aren't you? So you are a turnip eater. Chuchkov is from Arzamass, an onion eater. Mishatnikov, he's from Mtsensk; even the gypsies ride seven versts out of their way to avoid it. Kalganov's a Siberian—salt ears. Tuzhikov is a Rostov vegetable grower. The Devil to Rostov once did hie, but from the Rostov crosses was compelled to fly. Kruglyankin would be all right in every way, but he's from Tula. You see the different places we all come from and how different we all are, but we're all afraid in the same way."

Tregulyaev rose, walked round the fire and wanted to continue his monologue, but he was interrupted by Starynchuk. The tall recruit also rose, opened and closed his mouth like a fish, flapped his arms like fins and at last blurted out:

"Stop twittering like a sparrow, Maximych! . . . Don't foul the nest! . . . What I say is: Don't let the French, or even death, frighten you, mates!"

The Carabineers around the fire would have been less surprised had Starynchuk neighed like a horse or screeched like an owl, so accustomed had they become to his reticence. They were all astonished, and Tregulyaev in addition, lost his temper.

"Oh, the milksop!" he exclaimed. "He opens his mouth before the pap is ready! You should keep your ears open and wait till I have finished before butting in. We're all afraid in the same way. Looking back at Moscow we'd rush at the very Devil. That's how much we are afraid! It's an honest, soldier's fear, with no shame or disgrace! I'm not boasting, I'm speaking the plain truth. Sparrows don't twitter that way!"

Tregulyaev was obviously agitated. Brezgun raised his head and said:

"You are quite right, Maximych; so is Vlas. I'll not allow you to go for each other over trifles now! A sacred day awaits us—a sacred battle. Try and understand! Two rivers flow through the field of Borodino, and to each flows a stream. Perhaps you have not heard what they are called. Kolocha and Voyna, Ognik and Stonets.* You've got to understand what this means. There will be stabbing, fire and groaning galore on this battlefield. That's the first thing. And the second is—look how many Mikhails have gathered here!"

"What Mikhails, Ivan Ivanovich?"

"Well, count them on your fingers. Mikhail Larionovich Kutuzov, Mikhail Bogdanovich Barclay, Mikhail Andreyevich Miloradovich, Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov. And then there is Ney among the French. His first name is Michel, and in Russian that's also Mikhail." The Sergeant removed his shako and making the sign of the cross continued:

"In the seventeenth chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah it says plain and straight: 'In that day Prince Mikhail will rise with his host to defend his people.' Well? Which day? Which Prince Mikhail? Tomorrow, His Highness the Prince will rise to defend Russia! And we are his host. . . ."

Brezgun's voice trembled.

"There was the Battle of Poltava . . . and the Battle of Rimnik. Russia still remembers them. And it will not forget Borodino, not for hundreds of years! Let every man think well how he will behave tomorrow!"

Silence reigned around the campfire. A droshky dashed past with Bennigsen seated in it. Somebody asked the Sergeant:

"What the devil has brought this German here, Ivan Ivanovich?"

Brezgun stretched his neck as if he wanted to vomit.

"That one!" he said in a tone of scorn and disgust. "I know him a long time. He was in command over us in Prussia, in eighteen hundred and seven. He kept us in the mud, in hunger and cold, but he himself would ride from corps to corps in a carriage, on soft cushions. Nobody who saw him then will forget it as long as he lives. Tfu! May the Devil take him, the Lord forgive me! I've got it in for him for the rest of my life! Tfu!" The fury with which the Sergeant spat expressed a disrespect for a superior that nobody would have dreamed he was capable of.

"But Ivan Ivanovich," interjected an old Grenadier. "In eighteen hundred and seven they said that he gave little thought even to himself and that he ate whatever they gave him."

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* Literally: Stab and War; Fire and Groans.

"Ate, ate," Brezgun repeated wrathfully. "What he ate was his business. A commander can neglect himself if he wants to, but it's his duty to look after his men! Well, thank God, this German is being kept in his place now. It's different with Kutuzov and Bagrattion. An unequal combat lies before Russia tomorrow, but with them it will be an equal one."

* * *

Night set in, a pitch black night. Through the cracks in the wooden shutters of Bagrattion's hut the light of a dying candle dimly glimmered. The orderlies, escorts and Cossack despatch riders had turned in long ago and their loud snores were heard coming from the ante-room, the box-room, the loft and the hemp-barn. It seemed as though sleep reigned inside the hut too, but this was not the case. Prince Peter Ivanovich was lying on a camp bed, in his clothes, covered by a greatcoat, supporting his ruffled head with his fist. In the semi-gloom his face looked exceptionally pale. A sense of heavy weariness had clung to him for many days and nights. All day long he galloped from position to position, sometimes accompanied by Yermolov, sometimes by Kutaissov, and sometimes alone. He visited the batteries and regiments, and even went beyond the Utitsa Woods to visit Tuchkov. What a pity he had not managed to visit him that day! He watched Saint-Priest and consulted with Platov, Rayevsky and Konovnitsin. The days passed as quickly as if they were swept along by a hurricane. Then came night, but these silent hours brought Prince Peter neither rest nor sleep. He could not even remember when he had last had a good sleep, deep and sound, oblivious to everything, as a tired man should sleep. He spent his nights in a strange, translucent, restless and wearying state of semi-wakefulness and drowsiness. Such was the case this night.

Fragments of thoughts flitted through his mind like ragged clouds driven before the wind. At one moment he seemed to hear Yermolov's firm but kind, confident and suave voice, at another, the excited exclamations of Kutaissov seemed to resound through the hut. Sometimes he would see the single eye of the Field Marshal flashing with a penetrating light, and his pallid, smiling lips seemed to be mumbling, heaven knows what. Heaven knows what? The Field Marshal was hotly taking Bennigsen to task for his hypocrisy and talebearing. The Baron wrote to the Tsar every day, and in his letters he bespattered Kutuzov with his venomous slander. Kutuzov, however, received nothing from the Tsar but dry and official rescripts, invariably ending with the words: "I remain, Your Excellency, your well-wisher, Alexander." One day the Emperor sent Kutuzov one of Bennigsen's usual denunciations. That was worth a hundred rescripts! "Are you not the author of this despicable screed, Your Excellency? Caught, Eh! Begone!" Oh, if something like this could really happen!

Yermolov was sly. He took cover behind books. See, he opens a thick volume of Caesar's *Commentaries* and reads in Latin, but so that Bagrattion understands every word: "The 26th of August is a memorable day in Russia's history. In thirteen ninety-five Tamerlane stood at Elets, on the banks of the river Sosna, and ancient Rus trembled. But on the 26th of August this dread conqueror of India, Persia, Syria and Asia Minor suddenly turned his hordes and 'pursued by no one,' fled, never to set foot on Russian soil again. On the same day of August, in sixteen hundered and twelve, the Poles left devastated Moscow. . . ." Humph! Tomorrow is the 26th. Yermolov is cunning, while Bagrattion is unlearned. But live and learn. "Namesake, what has Caesar's *Commentaries* to do with all this?" "What does it matter?" answers Alexei Petrovich laughing. "The important thing is that tomorrow we shall catch victory, and it will not slip out of our grasp, no matter how much it twists and turns!"

Kutaissov also laughs. The millstones in some enormous mill are about to grind, and as soon as they do there will be nothing left of that handsome little General. And he knows it. How can he fail to know it, considering that he had been caught between the upper and nether millstones. But this does not daunt him in the least. He cries out with happy abandon "*Advienne que pourra!*"* Hurrah! Aha! He counts on the fact that Prince Andrei Golitsin, retired! Cornet of the Horse Guards, is Governor of Mozhaisk. How stupid his nephew was; as stupid as a ram! The idiot should have been taken from the Guards, torn away from cards and dissipation long ago. At his age Bagrattion drank only Kizlar and red Don wine, but what would you call this sort of thing? The old Golitsins were dead. The Simi estate was sold under the hammer, and "Prince Makarelli" was turning the pockets of the unhappy burghers of Mozhaisk inside out.

Something snapped with a resounding crack near Bagrattion's head. Had the millstones begun to turn, and had Mozhaisk failed to help Kutaissov after all? Prince Peter rubbed his eyes quickly and sat up. It was merely the spluttering of the greasy wick of the untrimmed candle. The red flame was dying, swaying from side to side and sending up wraiths of sooty smoke. The air in the hut was stifling. "Burghers. . . . Mozhaisk. . . . What were the orders I gave about Mozhaisk?" Bagrattion gave a start and jumped from the bed. His greatcoat slipped to the floor. The candle went out.

"Hey, friends!" he cried out loudly. "Send Olferyev to me! Lively now!"

* * *

The 7th Corps had its headquarters in a barn. None of the staff officers slept that night. They with the officers on duty and all the quartermaster officers were gathered in the barn, which was so large that there was room enough and to spare for them all. Squatting in front of overturned barrels and boxes adjutants were scribbling reports. Here and there in the corners some were playing faro. One of them had been punting with such invariable luck that he himself could stand it no longer. Gathering up his winnings he flung the cards down and said:

"I've had enough, gentlemen. This is a bad omen! I doubt whether I shall be as lucky tomorrow!"

In the middle of the barn, on a board covered with a blanket, Rayevsky,

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* What will be will be!

Paskevich and three Colonels of Artillery were playing Boston. Paskevich accidentally overturned the leather cup full of dice, which were thrown when the cards were dealt. The cup fell to the ground and the dice scattered. Ivan Fedorovich's small handsome face was distorted by a grimace. He was superstitious. One of the Colonels who was envious of the young General's rapid promotion, said:

"A bad omen, Your Excellency! But nothing can be done about it. All the men in my Brigade have put on white shirts. They are preparing for death."

Rayevsky unbuttoned his waistcoat and exposed a pure white shirt.

"The shirt's not the main thing!" he said. "The heart must be pure and the soul white."

Paskevich stooped to pick the scattered dice from the floor. His face was hidden by the board and his voice sounded muffled and strained:

"Oh, I have just remembered something, Nikolai Nikolayevich," he said. "I owe an apology to a certain officer for my forgetfulness. I wanted to recommend him for promotion, first for Saltanovka and later for Smolensk, but I kept on forgetting it. He is a brave officer and, besides, has lost two fingers."

"What's his name?" enquired Rayevsky.

"Lieutenant Travin, temporarily in command of the 26th Artillery Company. I want to recommend him for staff captain. And there is a gunner in the same company who ought to be promoted to sergeant."

"Well, send in your recommendations, Ivan Fedorovich. If we remain alive. . . ."

The door swung open with a terrific creak and Olferyev burst into the barn exclaiming:

"Your Excellency! This evening the Commander-in-Chief of the Second Army ordered that Headquarters, baggage and all the sick and non-combatants of the Corps be despatched to Mozhaisk. He intended to send you a written order to that effect, but it slipped his memory. He is extremely anxious. . . ."

"He need not have disturbed himself," answered Rayevsky. "There is not a single sick man or non-combatant in the 7th Corps. I have already sent them all off. Has the Prince had another sleepless night?"

* * *

The shack was so low that it was impossible to stand upright. It was possible only to lie or sit on the straw. In this dark and crowded nook six officers had gathered for the night. Nearly all of them were young, vigorous and brave. They had no desire to sleep and so they lay and talked. One of them said:

"What a pity, Polchaninov, that it is too dark for you to read us today's entry in your diary."

"It is only a short verse," answered Polchaninov, "I know it by heart, and I will recite it to you, if you wish." He recited the following:

To beat the Russians, am I destined ever?—Never!
But for them to beat me is impossible!—'Tis possible!
By whom, then, will I my triumph be robbed of?—Kutuzov!
What may France expect from her idol's decease?—Peace!

"Splendid!" cried the officers in admiration. "Splendid lines! Why don't you send them to the Academy, Polchaninov? Or dedicate them to the Emperor? Or perhaps publish them at your own expense and distribute them among the public? Lucky fellow to be able to write like that!"

But Alexander Rayevsky, who was lying next to Polchaninov, whispered in his ear:

"Don't listen to them; the lines are poor stuff!"

The Ensign regretted having recited those lines. "Thank God it's dark," he said. "I must have blushed. But how strange! Some like my 'Echo' others don't. And Travin today said it was trivial. What a pity I haven't a real poet among my acquaintances!" Suddenly a velvety, even voice was heard from the darkest corner of the shack. Nobody knew its owner.

"Man is such a grumbler that he always looks for flaws," said the voice. "If he eats honey, it must be with a big spoon. The virtue of your lines, Mr. Polchaninov, lies in that they express a high sense of patriotism. As for grumbling, forgive me for saying so, but your pen still lacks skill. But, as the Romans said: *ut desint vires, tamen est laudanda voluntas.** I am bound by ties of long friendship with the well-known Russian author and magazine publisher Mr. Karamzin. Today he is hiding from the Gallic invaders and has found refuge in Nizhni-Novgorod, on the banks of the Volga. But the danger will pass, and you have only to wish it for me to send your 'Echo' to Mr. Karamzin, and I guarantee that it will go straight to the printing press."

Polchaninov was so confused that he could not utter a word. The other officers modestly remained silent. The stranger's voice added:

"I find myself in your company unasked and uninvited, gentlemen. Permit me to introduce myself. Vassili Zhukovski, Lieutenant in Mamonov's Regiment of the Moscow Militia. Night overtook me on the road, and so I took shelter under your hospitable roof."

The name of the stranger echoed in Polchaninov's heart like the ring of hope. Which Zhukovski? Not the poet, surely? Not that splendid translator of Gray and Bürger? Breathing heavily with agitation and the effort to conceal it, he said:

"Your name is very well known from your translation of Gray's 'Elegy.' I was charmed by the picture of the 'Country Churchyard' when I was still in the Cadet Corps. Are you. . . ."

"You are not mistaken," answered Zhukovski in a low voice. "I am the translator of Gray."

Not all of Polchaninov's comrades had heard of Zhukovksi or of Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," but all realized that the night had brought them a literary celebrity as a guest. They were abashed by the circumstance and their conversation died out. Noticing this, Zhukovski cried out with sincere and ingenuous ardour:

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* If the power is lacking, the will is laudable

"Oh, gentlemen, a sanguinary problem will be solved tomorrow! There are six of us here. It is impossible to imagine that all of us will emerge from the battle unscathed. Some of us are destined to be killed or wounded."

"I heard my father say," said Alexander Rayevsky, stretching out on the straw, "that in big battles one out of ten is usually killed, and two out of ten are wounded. We are six. Consequently, either one or none of us will be killed, but one of us will certainly be wounded."

"Shall I be the tenth who must be killed tomorrow?" thought Polchaninov with horror. "To die? This does not mean merely ceasing to eat and drink; it means ceasing to see, to hear, to think, to make entries in one's diary. It means not printing the 'Echo,' losing Zhukovski, never meeting Karamzin."

"And so I say beforehand," continued Rayevsky, "that I may be wounded, but not killed, not under any circumstances."

"Why are you so confident?" asked several voices eagerly.

"I don't want to be killed, so I won't be killed. That's what happened at Saltanovka."

Polchaninov raised himself on his elbow. Straight in front of him, through a hole in the wall of the shack, he saw a patch of the dark, starry sky. "I will count how many stars I can see shining through the hole," he thought to himself. "If it is an odd number—I shall be killed." He counted. The number was nine. With despair gripping at his heart he counted again. Again it was nine. The Ensign felt hot and his chest seemed to contract. His heart was beating like a sledgehammer. He pointed to the hole in the wall and said:

"Do you see that big star in the sky, gentlemen?"

"That's Syrius, the gypsy star," said Zhukovski.

"If I am killed tomorrow, I would like to live there after my death!"

A Staff Captain who had been silent up till now said angrily:

"What nonsense! If that were possible, Ensign, thousands would be chasing after that gypsy star and there wouldn't be room on it for everybody. What's the use of talking like that? Guessing whether you'll be killed or not! Dark are the waters . . ."

He turned heavily to his side and continued:

"Stop this philosophizing. Better get some sleep, gentlemen. God's will be done. . . ."

And before he had finished speaking the Staff Captain was already snoring, soon to be seconded by two other officers.

"You began to talk about immortality, Polchaninov," said Alexander Rayevsky. "I too have no objection to immortality, but two things disturb me. Firstly, in order to become immortal one must first die, and that's a loathsome business. Secondly, one may get tired of living in paradise and listening to the same celestial music for all eternity."

He laughed, but neither Zhukovski nor Polchaninov responded to this mirth. Then he said with unexpected gravity:

"Nothing is lost in this world. When a man dies he continues to nurture the earth and the air, and his immortal spirit merges with the universal reason of things."

"What you have said is frightful," muttered Zhukovski. "Our reason, thoughts and spirit suffer a great deal on earth. Must we still suffer there, after having suffered here? It is painful to know how humanity suffers and to be unable to help it. I'm in favour of complete oblivion, of a vacuum!"

"But there must also be a limit to vacuum," said Polchaninov sadly.

"What do you mean?" asked Rayevsky in surprise. "Vacuum is part of the universe, and the universe is limitless. I too am part of the universe therefore, I too, am limitless. I was not joking when I said that I will not be killed because I do not want to be killed. I don't want to be killed, and that's all there is to it. I am limitless. Hence, I shall not be killed!"

"He is cleverer than I," thought Polchaninov, "but Travin is a better man. To Travin the world means our country, Russia. He recognizes no other. That being the case. . . ." Everything that had seemed strange and absurd in the conversation that had just taken place vanished, and what remained seemed so clear that Polchaninov, lifted from the straw by a mighty impulse of emotion, cried out:

"My immortality lies in the eternal existence of Russia! And so that she may live I am ready. . . . I want to die tomorrow!"

CHAPTER FORTY

Dawn had not yet broken, but the morning mist was already hovering over the Kolocha, gradually thickening and rising higher and higher until it became so dense that it completely blotted out the hilly river bank. Soon the sky became invisible. An enchanted realm of fog rolled and floated over the field of Borodino, beneath a low, light grey, almost white sky. Nobody would venture to predict whether the day would turn out to be dull or fine. This continued a long time until a bright warm patch appeared at a point in the East. The mist fled from this spot and patches of blue became distinctly visible in the sky. A rosy light lit up the horizon, and suddenly, the rays of the sun burst through, and hundreds of rainbows, crossing and intercrossing, stretched across the field over which an opal sea of glittering dew was shimmering. A wonderful silence prevailed. Only at intervals did something splash in the Kolocha, and the faint twittering of birds was heard among the reeds. The morning of the 26th of August, eighteen hundred and twelve was calm, peaceful and joyous.

The sun continued to rise in all its majesty, driving away the last shadows of night. Hundreds of drums beat the reveille, and then silence reigned again. In nature such silence usually precedes a storm; it sometimes descends on human masses on the threshold of grave danger. Great expectations are most often succeeded by great surprises. At the present time, however, the grim silence was comprehensible: the troops were expecting a battle; and because the morning was so pure and bright they felt that a battle was particularly desirable and necessary.

* * *

It was before the hour of six when an isolated cannon shot rang out from the Shevardino redoubt. The sound thundered across the field, reverberating in long-drawn echoes on every side until it melted away in the profound morning silence. Several minutes passed. Another shot rang out, then another and another. The air shimmered. The rattle of musketry fire was heard, and then the earth trembled and groaned with the thunder of artillery. The savage roar of the cannonade filled the silent valley, and tongues of flame and smoke broke over its peaceful hills. And above the din the whine of cannon-balls could be heard coming from a thousand directions.

The French were bombarding the Russian left flank with their Shevardino batteries. Over a hundred guns, mostly twelve-pounders, were battering Bagrattion's troops.

"Fall in!"

The troops marched in open or close order according to the word of command. Sabres and bayonets glistened and gun barrels gleamed, combining to form a gigantic rainbow over the land. The thunder of the guns no longer merged in one uniform roar. Now and again Bagrattion's trained ear caught the distant sounds of musketry fire. An attack was in preparation. On the left flank everything was ready to meet it. Standing on the escarpment of the middle *flèche*, Bagrattion eagerly watched the movements of the French lines. His face beamed with joy. Of his midnight indisposition not a trace was left. No, it is not a bed and a roof that ensures composure!

"They're off! They are marching!"

But where to? Prince Peter Ivanovich removed the spyglass from his eye; it had become a hindrance. To get a better view he leapt on his horse and stood up in the stirrups. The French were not advancing towards the left flank. They were attacking the centre, and had already forced their way into the village of Borodino. Terrific musketry fire was heard from the bridge. Smoke and dust obscured the scene, but the Guards and Chasseurs could be seen retreating across the bridge and the battery that was guarding it being withdrawn. In ten minutes all was over. No, not all! The Musketeers of the 1st Chasseur Regiment rushed into a counter-attack. The battle receded to the streets of the village, and from the streets into the field. "Aha!" thought Prince Peter. "A false move! Now they will come at me!"

* * *

The battlefield was submerged in a vortex of bluish smoke. Close to the ground, damp from dew and therefore attracting the waves of gunpowder smoke, this veil was particularly dense and impenetrable. The sun had lost its brilliance; it was now but a crimson sphere without rays, and hung over the battlefield like a lantern. The strains of the hundred-gun orchestra rose and fell, becoming subdued at one moment only to thunder forth with greater and more terrifying vigour than ever the next. The music of this artillery duel was discordant and wild, but now and again one caught harmonious chords, the more astonishing because they were so unexpected. Something weirdly poetical was heard in this monstrous accumulation of deafening sounds. It was exactly half past six when Count Vorontsov's Grenadiers, posted on the *flèches*, were attacked by the troops of Marshal Davout. Wave after wave swept across the scrub—these were the French regiments of the line. Vorontsov's Grenadiers made a bayonet charge, broke up the attacking column and returned to their position covered by a chain of Chasseurs. Vorontsov himself led his men into this bloody clash and returned with them, never for a moment releasing his sword from his hand or ceasing to smile his cold, stern smile. The respites were very brief, however. Again the waves of enemy attack swept forward. The chain of Chasseurs parted to leave space in which to meet the attackers, and the Grenadiers, with Vorontsov at their head, charged with their bayonets at the level, stabbing, slashing, trampling upon the foe, falling in hundreds themselves, but breaking up the French lines and then retiring to their positions. The attack was being led by Davout in person. Vorontsov caught sight of his round cheeks and furiously bulging eyes when during the second or third onslaught the French almost succeeded in mounting the left *flèche*. But this was only for an instant. Bayonets gleamed. Davout's horse crashed to the ground. The Marshal was carried out of the *mêlée* on a cavalry cloak used as a stretcher. The French reeled back. Then other Generals flashed on the scene—Compans, Desaix and Rapp, each retiring, covered with blood, to give place to the other. At last Rapp, tall and dark, was carried away, swearing like a trooper on receiving his twenty-second wound. Vorontsov looked round. God, how few of his Grenadiers had remained! His heart sank. He would have been amazed, even frightened, perhaps, had he been told that in that grim moment he was still smiling.

Davout's attack was repulsed. His divisions had only just been withdrawn, but already they were joined by fresh troops commanded by Ney. A little to the right, near Shevardino, Junot's Westphalian Corps appeared. At half past seven the French again advanced to attack the *flèches*: Ney in a frontal attack, and Junot making a detour of the Utitsa Woods. Furiously spurring his horse, Bagrattion galloped to the high ridge of the ravine. From here he obtained a splendid view of the Westphalians marching at an easy pace. The "oxen" had their tails turned to the place where Kutuzov had posted Tuchkov's 3rd Corps in ambush. Prince Peter Ivanovich was confident that Tuchkov was waiting to receive his guests, and was preparing to attack the Westphalians in their rear. He tore his hat from his head and, waving it wildly, shouted gleefully:

"Up at 'em, Duke my heart! Up at 'em!"

But the battle was going hard for the Russians at the *flèches*. Ney was leading the attack. Tall and lean, he galloped in front of the French columns, his Marshal's cape fluttering in the wind behind him. His ugly, thick-lipped, strong and manly face was flushed.

"*En avant!*" he shouted.

"*Vive l'Empereur!*" responded the soldiers racing after their commander.

The sun was now so brilliant that the glint of the enemy muskets dazzled the defenders of the *flèches*. Meanwhile the formidable French columns were sweeping towards them like the tide. Whirlwinds of lead swept from the waves of attackers and struck the *flèches*, causing havoc among Vorontsov's Grenadiers. The soldiers wavered and gathering into compact groups began to retire. Their bayonets were no longer in action. The scarlet standard of the French 57th Regiment of the line fluttered over the left *flèche* and the gilt eagle gleamed dully over the tall figure of Marshal Ney.

Vorontsov called to the remnants of a battalion, which had still kept its formation:

"Follow me! Bayonets! Brothers, see how Generals die!"

He was determined to recover the left *flèche*, even if. . . . A blow in the hip threw him to the ground. The battalion did not move. The French had already hauled guns to the redoubt, and shrapnel was mowing down the men around Vorontsov in whole squads. The Count wanted to wave his sword. A shrapnel bullet rang against the blade and carried half of it away, but he continued to grasp his broken sword even when his men, placing him on an improvised stretcher of muskets carried him from the *flèche* at a run. And he still held it ten minutes later in his lowered hand, when he found himself in front of Bagrattion. He was bareheaded; his face, as white as a pocket-handkerchief, was splashed with blood, but . . . but he still smiled. . . .

"Where were you hit, Count, my heart?"—enquired Bagrattion.

"In the hip, Your Excellency."

"And where is your Division?"

Vorontsov pointed his broken sword to the ground and replied:

"In the words of Count Fuentes at Rocroix I answer: Here!"

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Impressions crowded so closely one upon the other that one lost the sense of time. Hours seemed like minutes. The artillery duel had gone on for ever so long, but to Olferyev it still appeared as if it had just begun. Cannon-balls poured down upon Semyonovskoye like rain. Trees were sent crashing to the ground; peasant huts disappeared like the scenery on a stage; the air was rent by the din of battle; the earth trembled; men and horses were knocked down like skittles; gun carriages and ammunition boxes were smashed into splinters. Olferyev was struck by the absence of sound accompanying all this. It seemed to him as though these animate and inanimate objects were being taken up, broken and flung aside by some invisible hand.

It was exceptionally hot when Bagrattion summoned Olferyev and "Prince Makarelli" Golitsin. Prince Peter's horse reared and backed at the thunder of the guns, and he struck it on the head with the handle of his riding whip.

"Your Excellency!" said Saint-Priest to him. "Of Count Vorontsov's four thousand Grenadiers only three hundred have remained. Of eighteen staff officers—three. . . ."

Fiddlesticks! Hold your peace!" interrupted Bagrattion angrily. "One doesn't talk about casualties in the midst of a battle!"

Nevertheless he had already decided to do what he had been very reluctant to do, but which could no longer be avoided. He sent Golitsin to Rayevsky to ask him for two or three battalions of infantry and guns, and Olferyev to Tuchkov, ordering him to emerge from his ambush in Junot's rear and to despatch Konovnitsin's 3rd Division to the left flank.

"Fly like the wind, friends! Do you hear! If you delay—a bullet will be your reward!"

Noting the reins trembling in the hands of his young cousin, the Prince raised his riding whip and exclaimed:

"Spurs! Spurs, sir!"

Olferyev and "Prince Makarelli" galloped off in different directions.

* * *

The scene which met Olferyev's eyes as he left Semyonovskoye was both magnificent and gruesome. Columns of troops were marching across the field at a rapid pace, but in excellent formation. Companies of artillery were galloping to their positions with a terrific clatter. Aides-de-camp were galloping in different directions. Some of them on passing Olferyev shouted:

"What a day! You may carry orders just once more and then never return!"

The ground had been ploughed by cannon-balls into one long ravine. At one moment the whole scene was shut out by a bluish curtain; at another the curtain was torn asunder. Then the brilliant sun lit up the battlefield and the scene became still more gruesome and magnificent. Human bodies were lying scattered everywhere, heaped one upon the other like logs of wood. "The brave ones on their backs, the cowards face downwards," commented Olferyev to himself. "But is that always so?" Wounded horses, their manes flowing in the wind, hobbled away in an effort to escape from this scene of horror. Some monstrous power had heaped up these mountains of mutilated bodies, guns and miserable iron skeletons, which only a while ago had been ammunition boxes. All this flashed past Olferyev's eyes in disorderly chaos, now barely visible through the misty curtain of battle, now rising in front of him in his path.

From the woods, on the other side of which General Tuchkov's 3rd Corps was supposed to be in ambush, enormous columns of fire and smoke were rising, and each new flash was accompanied by a thunderous roar. To his amazement Olferyev saw dense ranks of Westphalian or Polish infantry, he was not sure which, on the outskirts of the wood. The bright sun was reflected by the soldiers' weapons and resplendent uniforms. They were advancing to attack, ascending the slope of a wooded hill in three columns. "Whom are they attacking?" Olferyev asked himself. "Tuchkov? Why is he here? When did he leave his ambush, and why?" These questions rose in his mind one after another, each more sinister than the other. His heart sank. He put his horse into brisk canter to make a detour of the attacking force, deliberately refraining from taking cover although he knew that he would be shot at. "This is my duel with Klingfer!" he said to himself.

Tuchkov's infantry was standing on the slope of the wooded hill under terrific fire, but absolutely motionless. When a cannon-ball struck their ranks and knocked out one or two of them, and perhaps a whole line, others stepped up silently to fill the breach. There was neither bombast nor timidity in this. Tuchkov himself, together with his Staff, was posted in a large glade from which the middle clearing began. The General was pacing backwards and forwards, ignoring the grenades which burst around him, and the explosions of which Olferyev had seen from a distance. The General had his hands behind his back; his sombre face expressed vexation and anger. He knew that this would happen when Bennigsen had ordered him to take up this position, and the absurdity of it drove him to fury. But like most obstinate men who are compelled to sumbit to *force majeure* he now took revenge by remaining inactive. He intended to put the blame for his inactivity, and for the casualties which it was causing, upon Bennigsen and, pacing up and down the glade, he turned over in his mind how best to do this. At this moment Olferyev galloped up to him.

"How is it Your Excellency is here on the other side of the wood? Not in ambush?" he enquired.

Tuchkov looked at the aide-de-camp in disgust. "Who is this stripling? What impudence to question me!" he thought, but aloud he said to Olferyev:

"Don't ask me, brother, ask Mr. Baron Bennigsen. Who sent you here, and why?"

Olferyev reported:

"His Excellency Prince Bagrattion has instructed me to represent to Your Excellency that it is time for you to leave your ambush and go into the rear of the Westphalian Corps."

Tuchkov stamped his foot and roared:

"What's this piffle, Mr. Adjutant! What ambush? There's no ambush! You can see that for yourself! And I can't operate in anybody's rear now!"

Olferyev bit his lip and continued:

"Moreover, His Excellency requests Your Excellency to detail General Konovnitsin's 3rd Division to reinforce the left flank."

"What?" shouted Tuchkov. "I can't!"

"Your Excellency!"

"I am an old General, brother. I know what I am about. Can't you see that I am being attacked myself? I have been fooled once. I won't be fooled again!"

With that General Tuchkov resumed his pacing up and down the glade and began to talk, his ire rising with every word he uttered, and unconsciously, from habit, dropping into French:

"*Il paraît que tout le monde commande ici.*"*

Olferyev realized that the day was lost on all sides. Suddenly the thought of what was happening on the left flank and of how Bagrattion would take

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* It seems to me that all the world is in command here.

Tuchkov's rough refusal to obey his orders struck him with horror. Despair and anger gripped his heart, and the audacious words slipped unbidden from his lips:

"*Mon général, il paraît au contraire que personne ne commande ici!*"*

"You insolent puppy!" roared Tuchkov. "*Vaurien!*"**

The last word was drowned by the deafening roar of an explosion. The woods groaned. Flames leapt to the sky. Earth and dust whirled over the glade. When Olferyev opened his eyes his gaze at once fell upon the blood-stained figure of Tuchkov under a pine tree. He was sitting astride an exposed root, clutching the air with his hands. His head drooped. A huge gash gaped in his side. His aides were bustling around him and shouting.

Several minutes later Olferyev was leading General Konovnitsin's 3rd Division from the Utitsa Wood to the left flank.

* * *

Konovnitsin's Division marched past the camp of the Moscow Militia. The latter had not yet been in action; they were waiting for orders. But the camp was already under heavy enemy fire. The militiamen wagged their heads, bowed and made the sign of the cross; some even dropped to their knees and prayed. Zhukovski watched Konovnitsin's troops marching to the left flank, out of one inferno into another. To the soldiers, the timidity displayed by the militiamen seemed ridiculous and incomprehensible. Now and again jeers would be heard from their ranks:

"Bow, bow lower, black beard! Take your hat off! Cross yourselves with big crosses! Bump your foreheads on the ground, you Silly Billies!"

"Travin is right!" said Zhukovski to himself. "It is hard, very hard to understand the Russian soldier. As for me—I don't understand him at all."

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Near the last house standing on a mound at the extreme end of the village of Gorki three guns were posted. From this battery the Field Marshal, sitting on a folding stool, his chin resting on his plump hands folded over the hilt of his sword, was watching the course of the battle. The battle raged all along the line. The earth groaned in unison with the thunder of guns, which reverberated in the forest clearings on the other side of the village. Cannon-balls were whirling and twirling whichever way one looked. Several of these cast-iron guests had already visited the battery where the Field Marshal was sitting. He alone had failed to notice them. Each time the roar of the guns increased in intensity he muttered to himself:

"Keep calm, friend!"

His face was grave, but quite serene. The course the battle was taking was quite clear to him. He was confident that the right flank would not be attacked. His thoughts were concentrated upon the left flank, and upon Rayevsky's battery, which though concealed by black smoke could be distinctly heard. The Semyonovskoye *flèches* had changed hands several times and General Brousier's Division was fiercely attacking the battery, but the left flank remained the most vital sector.

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* On the contrary, General, I think nobody is in command here.

** Rascal.

Standing by Kutuzov's side was Bennigsen. The latter, rapidly licking his lips, said with emotion, speaking in German:

"*Bagrattion. . . . Bagrattion. . . . Er ist in grösster Erschöpfung und Zerrüttung. Aber ein Paar Tausend Kosaken—und alles wäre gerettet.*"*

Kutuzov pretended to listen to his chatter and now and again even responded with a few laconic phrases, such as:

"*Es scheint, Herr Baron, daß diesmal die entscheidensten Augenblicke begonnen. . . .*"**

Suddenly he rose from his stool and called out:

"My horse!"

The members of his suite rushed to their horses, but he signed to them to remain where they were. His orderlies helped him into the saddle. He lightly struck his white, long-tailed Mecklenburg with his riding whip and descended the mound at a slow trot to meet the aide-de-camp, whom he had seen for some time already galloping towards the battery from the left flank. He had no idea what message Bagrattion was sending him, but he did not expect good news. If it was bad news he wanted to hear it alone, without witnesses. He halted at a little distance from the battery and when Olferyev abruptly reined in his horse and saluted, he said to him briefly:

"Don't keep me in suspense, brother!"

Olferyev reported all that was going on on the left flank. Kutuzov listened, slowly nodding his head. His face, covered with a fine network of tiny, reddish capillaries, remained calm. It remained calm even when Olferyev reported that Bennigsen had withdrawn the 3rd Corps from its ambush the day before and that General Tuchkov had been killed; but his stubby fingers, which had been playing with his riding whip, gripped the handle with such force that it broke in two. He made no comment, but he did not want to hear any more. He turned his horse and with drooping head rode slowly back to the mound. Olferyev noticed that his lips were moving, and the Cornet thought he heard a good, strong, Russian oath whispered by those pale, sunken, senile lips. On reaching the mound Kutuzov dismounted and said to Bennigsen:

"You are right, as always, Your Excellency! We must reinforce the left flank, but not with two thousand Cossacks. Please take the 2nd and 4th Corps and lead them to Prince Bagrattion. To whom else than Your Excellency can I entrust this dangerous mission?"

Bennigsen bowed and went to his horse. Kutuzov beckoned to Tol and when the latter approached he said in an undertone:

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* Bagrattion. . . . Bagrattion . . . he is retreating in the greatest disorder! A couple of thousand Cossacks, however, would set all to rights.

** I think, Mr. Baron, the decisive moment has arrived.

"Go with him, Karlusha, and don't let him out of your sight, otherwise he'll be up to some mischief again!"

* * *

Quite early in the morning Barclay, accompanied by his adjutants, rode out to the road leading from Borodino to Gorki and halted there near two batteries. Here he remained. The batteries were in continuous action and drew upon themselves heavy enemy fire. Barclay was in his General's uniform, with plumed hat and all his decorations. He kept his adjutants very busy. Every now and again he sent them off to various units with orders, taking care to send timely reinforcements to the weak points. In this he was successful, but his adjutants dropped out one after another. A wild French Cuirassier, dashing far in front of the firing line, shot Count Leiming with a pistol. Leiming was standing right by Barclay's side. The latter had already had four horses shot under him, the last one being a very tall, grey, stub-tailed gelding. Barclay sat in the saddle with a spyglass glued to his eye, watching the course of the battle on the left flank. Bagrattion's position was causing him anxiety. Suddenly his horse squealed, quite unlike a horse, and dropped to its knees. Keeping the spyglass glued to his eye Barclay calmly stepped over the horse's head and called out:

"Another horse!"

A fifth horse was brought him. Mounting, he pressed the spyglass still closer to his eye. The left flank was wavering. The fight for the middle *flèche*, the last one, was in progress. Barclay looked round and called:

"Klingfer!"

When the Captain rode up in answer to the summons Barclay said to him:

"Bagrattion is perishing! My dear Captain! Please gallop to General Dorokhov and convey to him the following: 'Barclay orders him immediately to send his cavalry regiments to Bagrattion's aid.' Take from the reserve the Ismailov Life Guards, the Lithuanian and Finnish Regiments, two companies of the Guards Artillery and three regiments of the lst Cuirassiers Division and lead them all to the left flank. Make haste, Captain! It is very urgent, very!"

Klingfer saluted and pulled his horse round to depart.

"Wait a moment!" said Barclay, gazing fixedly at the Captain. "Probably we shall not meet again. . . . Life is a burden to me, Klingfer. I would be glad if fate relieved me of it. I am almost certain that we shall not meet again. Farewell! God speed!"

Barclay extended his hand to his faithful adjutant. The Captain pressed it to his breast. A moment later he was galloping to meet the French markers from the advancing line of Musketeers, and then galloped along this line, under a running fire. "It is indeed doubtful whether I shall see you again, my dear General," he thought. "Perhaps fate will be just this time and preserve Barclay for Russia; but I . . . my honour and my oath must bring me to grips with death this day!"

* * *

The Semyonovskoye *flèches* were shaped like redans or ordinary camp fortifications, forming a sharp angle, open on the attacking side. By means of shrapnel fire from the rear it was quite easy to annihilate all their occupants. For the same reason they were ever so much harder to hold than to capture.

Bagrattion realized this. The left *flèche* could easily be recovered by means of several salvoes of shrapnel, followed by an infantry attack. And it had to be recovered at all costs.

"General!" shouted Prince Peter Ivanovich to Neverovsky. "Take your Division and recapture the left entrenchment!"

Neverovsky silently placed his finger to the rim of his hat in salute. The din of battle drowned all words. It would have been better to have explained to this young General that he should commence his operations with shrapnel fire, but this was impossible. "Surely he will understand that himself," thought Bagrattion, galloping off to the fortifications on the right, where a frightful *mêlée* was in progress.

Of the French 57th Regiment of the line, which had broken into the left *flèche* scarcely anything remained. Ney was drawing up General Ledru's Division when he encountered Neverovsky's weak battalions. The entire 27th Division rushed to the attack in two columns, but these columns were so small that Ney said to himself: "I shall crush this brave but unfortunate regiment in a trice!" He made a sign. Ledru's Division divided to allow the guns to go forward.

"Down!" Neverovsky managed to shout to his men.

The infantry dropped to the ground and the shrapnel screeching over their heads struck the parapets of the rear entrenchments with such force that the earth rose to the sky like a black cloud. Neverovsky was knocked off his horse at the first salvo. The second and third salvoes decided the issue: the left *flèche* was not recovered.

At about 10 o'clock General Gorchakov, commander of the 8th Corps, was carried from the right *flèche*, his head covered with his blood-stained greatcoat. He moaned softly. The right *flèche* was already in the hands of the French, and the fight was now proceeding for the middle and last one. Here the flashes of gunfire which rent the curtain of smoke were more frequent and brilliant than at any other point, and the advancing columns of attacking French troops loomed darkly in the field. Prince Karl Mecklenburg, at the head of the Kiev, Moscow and Astrakhan Grenadier Regiments, had led bayonet charges against these columns several times and had repulsed them, but more and more divisions kept pressing towards the *flèche*. A cannon-ball laid the Prince low.

Bagrattion galloped hither and thither amidst this inferno, spurring on his horse and looking round in search of a means of saving the situation. Where was he to obtain fresh troops? But such troops were still available! Here was a Brigade of Grenadiers, hastening up at the double quick, keeping in good step and passing the batteries in perfect order as if on parade. Guns were limbered up, hauled forward and turned on the French attackers, peppering them with shrapnel. The Grenadiers passed the batteries again, holding their muskets at the level, but withholding their fire. The attackers soon stopped firing. The columns drew closer to each other in grim silence. At the head of the Brigade, on his little pony, rode Kantakuzen, at a walking pace.

"Hurrah! Prince! I am with you!" shouted Bagrattion.

The Colonel merely nodded in reply. One would have thought that he had not recognized Bagrattion, but this was not the case. During these solemn moments Grigory Matveyevich was in that wonderful state of intense emotion and exaltation when men and human relationships recede into the background and one becomes equally indifferent to the sympathy of friends and the hatred of enemies. Kantakuzen was going into a battle from which there would be no return, and he was aware of it. There were only two things in the world to which he was not indifferent at this moment: the rapidly diminishing distance that separated him from the French, and the firm step of the troops marching behind him. All his feelings were absorbed by these two things. That was why he did not respond to Bagrattion's greeting. Prince Peter understood the reason. Who realized better than he how limitless was the power this sacred moment exercised over the soul of his doomed friend!

"God speed, Prince, my heart!"

To give his men room for the run that was essential for a good bayonet charge, Kantakuzen backed his horse into the space between the regiments. The Grenadiers noticed this and Grigory Matveyevich's quick ear told him that the marching men had got out of step. He immediately galloped forward crying:

"I am here, my lads! I am here! You don't want me to get in your way, do you? Hurrah!"

The men resumed their even and steady pace. Kantakuzen again backed between the regiments. Not more than seventy feet separated the Grenadiers from the French.

Kantakuzen waved his sword and commanded: "Charge!"

The Grenadiers dashed forward. Bayonets clashed, muskets crashed against muskets to be shattered into splinters, butts were swinging and the clang of sabre against sabre was heard. The fight raged on one spot, neither side yielding ground, and as the moments passed the mound of dead bodies around the combatants rose higher and higher. Kantakuzen threw his head back;his sword slipped from his hand.His face became ghastly pale.He slipped slowly from his horse, but a drummer caught him. The death of their commander and the sudden cessation of the rattle of the drum dampened the ardour of the troops. Hundreds of arms seemed suddenly to become enfeebled anddropped to their owners' sides. Hundreds of feet futilely stamped the ground around the drummer who was supporting Kantakuzen's body. The dead man's dark eyes were wide open in a fierce and astonished stare. His whiskers were ruffled and a straw was entangled in the left one. A stream of dark blood trickled from one of his thick and shaggy brows. Polchaninov gazed at the General and muttered: "Farewell, Prince! Farewell, my father!" From that moment he ceased to be conscious of what he was doing. What he did was done by his voice, by his arms, but not by himself.

He snatched the colours from the hands of the colour-bearer and flung them far ahead in the direction of the French lines. The dark silk fabric fluttered heavily in the air. Numerous hands stretched eagerly towards it from all sides.

"Do the Grenadiers want to lose their colours?" he cried, rushing in the direction in which he had thrown the flag.

The entire Company dashed so furiously after Polchaninov that they reached the spot where the symbol of the Grenadier's glory might have been lost forever in an instant. In that instant something scorched Polchaninov's chest and he felt as if a red hot iron had been plunged between his ribs. A broad, French bayonet entered his body with a squelch and a twist. Clutching the slippery, two-edged strip of steel with both his hands, Polchaninov raised his head and distinctly saw the tattered colours fluttering proudly in the wind.

"We have repulsed them, your honour! As you call in the woods, so the echo answers!"

This was Tregulyaev speaking, bending over the dead officer.

* * *

The attacks of Generals Brousier and Morand on Rayevsky's battery commenced at half past nine and were extremely fierce from the very outset. Dense columns of French troops advanced like storm clouds with blue colours flying, to the strains of martial music and beating drums.

"*Allons! Avancez!*"*

"Lads! You take one half of the French and we will take the other!" shouted Travin to a squad of infantrymen standing under cover near his guns.

He felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. He looked round. It was General Paskevich, who had already led two bayonet charges of the four regiments of his 26th Division and was preparing to repulse the enemy attack a third time. Travin wondered at the malicious restlessness of his piercing eyes.

"See here, Lieutenant!" said the General. "We shall repulse these rascals now, but after that you will take your company to reinforce the left flank. Tomorrow I will recommend you for promotion, and on the day after I will have you transferred from my Division."

"Yes, Sir!" answered Travin. "But may I ask you why you propose to do this, Your Excellency?"

Paskevich straightened up and said:

"Because men like you prevent me from being myself. Go to the devil, Lieutenant!"

Travin had no time to reply.

"*Allons! Avancez!*"

The French infantry had almost reached the battery when the Russian guns roared, all in one voice, as if by word of command. Actually nobody had given this command. The fire swept the enemy's ranks and dispersed them, but only for a moment. They rallied again, joining over the bodies of the fallen, and surged forward, in even line, into the jaws of death. The shrapnel whined again and again, and again the French lines were broken; but again they were rallied by their commanders and continued to press forward. The battery now fired in salvoes, with deadly aim. The storm cloud began to disperse, the rattle of the drums and the martial music subsided, but the French continued to advance, their lines swaying backward and forward. Travin fired another salvo, and he thought he saw the advancing line stop and waver.

---

* Come on! Forward!

"Fine, Gunners of No. 26! Splendid!" shouted Paskevich.

"Go to the devil, General!" said Travin slowly and emphatically.

The attackers rushed the battery.

* * *

Fierce though the French onslaught on this battery was, General Rayevsky sent after "Prince Makarelli" almost half his Corps to reinforce the left flank. Golitsin brought up three regiments of infantry and several companies of artillery. Among the latter was Travin's Company.

The situation on the left flank was no better than on the battery. Grenades barked and cannon-balls whined. A gunner fell, then another, a third jumped up and dropped prostrate to the ground.

Bagrattion galloped past.

"Limbers and ammunition carts to the rear! Guns to remain!" he ordered.

Travin's Company made its way to the position with difficulty. The interior of the middle *flèche* and its vicinity were so encumbered with corpses that there was no room for the guns to pass. The guns rode over the bodies. There was a particularly large number of dead in the moat, in front of the angle of the lunette, and the place was heaped with muskets, sabres and shakos. There were scarcely any guns on the *flèche* itself, but opposed to it there was an endless line of French batteries, all in action. When the smoke was dispersed by the wind for a moment, Travin could distinctly see the French loading and training their guns and putting their matches to the touch-holes. The roar of cannon drowned the rattle of musketry and the cries and groans of the wounded. To make their commands heard the officers were obliged to shout at the top of their voices. Something fell plump into an ammunition box. The men scattered.

"Grenade!"

Ugodnikov rushed to the box and quickly tore open the lid.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

"What are you doing!" shouted Travin.

"All correct, your honour! A blank shot. It damaged the tops of the sockets and got stuck."

Ugodnikov's face was deathly pale. Travin took his hand and gripped it with all his might. Meanwhile the musketry fire gradually receded. The bullets no longer whistled, but buzzed with the peculiar sound of spent bullets. Then the artillery became silent. What had happened? Something flashed in the dense cloud of dust in front of the middle *flèche*.

"Looks as if they're chucking their lobster pots at us, your honour!" remarked Ugodnikov.

Indeed, a column of French Cuirassiers were advancing to attack the *flèche*, their bronze cuirasses and steel sabres flashing in the sun. It was they who had screened the operations of the French artillery. They were advancing at a trot, straight for their objective, and soon no more than seven hundred feet remained between their front line and the *flèche*. Travin saw the neighbouring companies limber their guns and withdraw. The ingrained fear of losing the guns had proved more potent than all Bagrattion's instructions and Kutaissov's explanations. An old, German artillery Colonel dashed up to Travin and shouted:

"Can't you see what's going on, Mr. Lieutenant? Withdraw your guns!"

"I will not!" answered Travin curtly.

"Good, my heart!"

It was the voice of Bagrattion who had come up unobserved. "Send the fool to the. . . . Shah! His life is more precious to him than glory! I'll have his head off! Put the guns round, Lieutenant!"

Travin's guns were loaded with shrapnel. Quickly he turned over in his mind how best to operate. A regiment of Dragoons emerged from behind Bagrattion to hold up the French attack. Travin realized what he had to do: allow the French Cuirassiers to come within close range and meet them with gunfire, and so help the Dragoons to repel the attack. The crucial moment arrived with incredible speed.Noticing that Ugodnikov was putting his match to the touch-hole, the Lieutenant nodded: but at that moment the Cuirassiers wheeled and revealed the artillery which had been following behind them. The salvoes from both the Russian and French guns rang out simultaneously and, fired at close range, the shrapnel laid men and horses low in the French as well as in Travin's ranks. The resulting confusion lasted no more than a minute. The charges were ready. Travin's guns fired another salvo. Bagrattion waved his sword and the Dragoons charged to counterattack. There was some confusion round the French battery; evidently an ammunition box had exploded. The Dragoons charged the silent guns: the battery was no more. The bronze-clad giants dropped from their enormous grey horses in scores. Wildly rolling their eyes and panting heavily the horses unseated their riders and galloped away. Men had their feet entangled in their stirrups and were dragged along the ground. The horses in the rear stumbled and fell across those in front. In spite of all, the Cuirassiers were already trampling the ground beneath the parapet of the *flèche*. A gleaming cloud of upraised sabres hovered over the horses. Travin saw the faces of the horsemen and could distinguish the colour of their eyes, so near were they. . . .

* * *

The Dragoons hacked their way through the lines of the Cuirassiers and charged into the column of French infantry behind them. The infantry were taken by surprise and dropped just where they stood under the Dragoons' sabres. Men lay in heaps, and over these heaps the Dragoons charged. . . .

* * *

Ugodnikov retired to a bush a little to the rear, sat down and removed his coat and shirt. His left arm was twisted so that the palm was turned upward, and the jagged end of pink bone showed through the skin just below the elbow. Grinding his teeth with pain, a hot sweat breaking over his body, the gunner twisted the injured hand into place with his sound one. "It's back," he muttered through his pallid lips. But the bone below the elbow would not go into its place in spite of all his efforts. Ugodnikov spat in disgust, quickly bound up the arm and put on his coat. He wanted to rise to his feet, but his legs trembled and refused to obey him. What was he to do? He drew his flint and steel from his pocket and struck a light for his pipe. His brain cleared with the very first sparks and his legs ceased to tremble. He sat puffing at his pipe for a moment or two, listening to the roar of battle that reached him from the *flèche*, and then rose and walked back into the firing line.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Napoleon was pacing rapidly in front of his tent with a handkerchief in his hand, sneezing loudly. He had caught a very bad cold and was tortured by a hacking cough. After a sleepless night and two glasses of punch, his eyes watered atrociously. He felt extremely unwell, and this disgusting, morbid limpness of his body affected his heart and head. His will seemed to be strangely weakened, and his thoughts, wandering from one place to another over the teeming battlefield, could not settle on the main thing. The Emperor positively could not tell what was the main thing at this moment, or what required immediate attention; nor did he know what to undertake at once to make it the main thing that would decide the issue of this gruesome day. Never before had he been conscious of such amazing indecision. "No doubt I look pale," he thought with a feeling of revulsion towards himself and towards the cause of his pallor. "This won't do! It will create a bad impression." He tried to conceal his condition from his Generals and the high officers of his Staff. Several times he said firmly and deliberately:

"Not everything on the chessboard is clear to me yet. The time for my move has not yet arrived!"

But he had no particular move in his mind. When somebody in his suite suggested that the Old Guard should be sent to Ney's assistance, Napoleon angrily retorted over his shoulder:

"The Guards will not budge!"

No, he would not send the Guards into action even if that decided the issue in half an hour. Why? A strange feeling, hot and sharp like a spark, entered the Emperor's breast and seared his soul. He would have been amazed had he guessed that this was the feeling of dread; but he did not guess this and did not want anybody else to guess it. To keep up his spirits and those of the others he said:

"Everything is going on splendidly! The Russians dare not advance, nor will they retreat, so they are dying in their tracks. Excellent!"

An officer, covered with dust from head to foot galloped up to the Emperor and saluting with his sword said:

"Your Majesty! I come from Marshal Ney. The Marshal has ordered me to report that all the Divisional Commanders have been wounded and the cavalry attack has been repulsed. Bagrattion is about to attack. Not a moment must be lost. The Marshal begs you to send the Guards!"

Napoleon shrugged his shoulders. This was Ney! The son of a Lorraine artisan, Marshal of France, who this day was to be proclaimed Prince of the Moskwa for his services in this battle. Ney the lion, the bravest of the brave, kind, honest and ardent, but too straightforward! Generals send such reports only when they are defeated. Is he. . . . The spark of dread that had penetrated the Emperor's breast flashed again.

"Gallop back to the Marshal," he said to the aide-de-camp, "and tell him that the Guards will not budge, but I shall at once order the King of Naples to repeat the cavalry attacks and to go on repeating them until the Marshal captures these damned fortifications!"

* * *

Ney, Murat and Junot, who had at last emerged from the forest with his Westphalians, undertook a joint attack on the middle *flèche.*

Joachim Murat, King of Naples, tall and graceful, with an open, swarthy face, his blue eyes shining like stars and his teeth like pearls, led the Cuirassiers in person. His long silky hair and his green velvet, gold-embroidered cloak fluttered in the wind; the tall white plume of his cocked hat could be seen from a considerable distance on all sides. Murat furiously dug the gilt spurs fastened to his high, yellow Hungarian boots into the sides of his chestnut Arab steed and galloped up and down the line crying out in his husky voice and Gascon accent:

"Splendid, my children! You are attacking like angels!"

On reaching the breastwork of the *flèche* he shouted:

"Bravest of the brave! Follow me!"

He charged up the breastwork and for several minutes stood on the ridge under a hail of bullets, surrounded by a struggling crowd of French and Russians. Then somebody's solicitous hand took his horse by the bridle and led it down. Another second, and Naples would have lost its king.

* * *

The shrapnel of the Semyonovskoye Battery mowed down the French infantry led by Ney in whole companies, but those who still remained on their feet marched forward undaunted and with unslackening pace. Dismounting from his horse, Olferyev drew his powder flask from his pocket and poured some powder into the pan of his pistol, of which the butt was carved like an eagle's head. Using his saddle as a rest, he took aim and fired. He did this again and again. The French forces drew nearer and nearer to the redan, inexorably, like a moving wall.

"What are they up to? Are they in league with death?"

The soldier who uttered these words dropped with his face in the dust. The French reached the *flèche*. The whirlwind of fire continued to mow them down, and they lay in rows, like ripe sheaves of corn in a field. But they seemed to rise again like corn, row behind row. They were preceded by Musketeers of the line. Several of the linesmen ran ahead and leaped on to the breastwork of the *flèche*, where only a little while before Murat had stood in all his splendour. But this time the French were led not by a king, but by humble, grey-haired, red-nosed Major Lemoine. He stood on the parapet waving his sword and hundreds of linesmen clambered up towards him. In a moment they would be hacked to pieces, but what amazing courage! It was a magnificent spectacle.

"Splendid!"

The exclamation was uttered so loudly and ungrudgingly that it was clearly heard above the din of battle. Olferyev turned round to see who had uttered it.

"Splendid!" cried Bagrattion laughing and clapping his hands in admiration of the courage displayed by the foe.

Lemoine and his linesmen were no longer on the breastwork. Nor were they on the other side. They had been received by the bristling points of the Russian bayonets. But in their wake came fresh regiments, and the interior of the redan was converted into a raging inferno. Cannon-balls, whining and spinning, mowed men down by the dozen, and vacant spaces streaked with fresh blood appeared in the defending line. Hissing, bursting grenades added to the slaughter.

"Close ranks!"

The breaches in the line were closed. The rapid fire of musketry swept the ranks like lightning and the attacking forces in front of the redan were reduced to heaps of corpses. But they seemed to rise and sweep forward again. . . .

* * *

At eleven o'clock precisely, the Cuirassiers and Chasseurs repulsed Junot's Westphalian Corps and drove it back to the woods from which it had come. Ney's regiments, however, occupied the middle *flèche* at Semyonovskoye. This was the last of the fortifications on this wing of the Russian left flank. The Russian troops were huddled between the *flèches* and the village and were being mown down by shrapnel. By this time there were as many French guns on the *flèches* as could possibly be posted there, and all were trained upon the retreating troops. The worst of it was that so many men were crowded in this small space and their position seemed to be frightful and hopeless.

"Even a coward would find no cover here," said Bagrattion to General Konovnitsin. "We must recover the *flèches*, Peter Petrovich! Take your 3rd Division and attack. I will go with you."

"Would it not be better, Your Highness, to withdraw the troops to the other side of the ravine, post a strong battery. . . ."

Konovnitsin's lean sallow face was distorted as if by pain, beads of perspiration dripped from his shaggy brows and long fair eyelashes. His clear bright eyes were downcast. He did not believe that a counter-attack would be successful and said what every other brave general in his place would have said. But he said it without anger or malice. None of the battles he had taken or would still take part in, meant as much to him as the issue of this one battle meant to Bagrattion. If the French Army did not dash itself to pieces against the Russian Army today, Moscow was doomed. And the doom of Moscow meant the doom of Russia. And so, Russia would perish as a consequence of the defeat of her Army in the battle which Bagrattion had longed for and demanded since the outbreak of the war. Had not Barclay restrained the Prince, and had not Kutuzov resorted to stratagems, this disaster would have happened long ago. Consequently, everything Prince Peter had done from the 16th of June to the 26th of August, all his apparent victories and defeats in the fierce struggle he had waged against Barclay had all been a terrible and fatal blunder. Were Bagrattion to consummate this blunder, the harm done to his country would be incalculable. For such blunders one must answer with one's life! But what was the life of one man if Russia perished? It so happened that here, on the left flank, in these wretched redans, her fate hung in the balance. Happy Konovnitsin! He could not reason in this way. Bagrattion, however, could reason only in this way: it was his duty to reason so. He took Konovnitsin by the arm and said:

"Peter Petrovich! Here are my orders: take your Division and recover the *flèches*! I will order Vassilchikov to bring the entire cavalry into action! And to add certainty of success to hope, I will myself lead a unit. . . ."

He looked round and continued:

"Look at those battalions of Grenadiers huddling over there! They are the remnants of Prince Kantakuzen's force. I will lead them. Go to your Division, Peter Petrovich, and God be with you! Alyosha! Dash off to the artillery which Rayevsky has sent and order them to prepare for an attack! Spurs!"

* * *

Of Kantakuzen's Brigade less than half was left, but even these remnants had not yet been withdrawn from the line of fire. The Grenadiers stood huddled in a gully, almost without officers, most of whom had been killed during the attack, and gazed furtively from side to side. Musket balls and grenade splinters continued to tear man after man from their broken ranks. To this they were already accustomed. What frightened them was the thought that they had been forgotten and abandoned. They lacked a commander.

"Give me a pipeful o'baccy, brother," said Tregulyaev to a Carabineer standing by his side. "This is getting on my nerves!"

"Drop that, Maximych," answered the Carabineer. "We shall be ordered to advance in a minute."

"No we won't," retorted Tregulyaev. "What's the hurry? In this peaceful grove let us longer tarry!"

Even in this tight corner his fondness for a quip and jest did not desert him. This roused Brezgun's ire.

"Shut up, you fool!" he growled. "You've no idea what's going to happen to you yet!"

Suddenly Bagrattion appeared before the Grenadiers. The Prince pointed in the direction where their commander had been killed and said:

"They have killed your friend and mine! Kantakuzen is no longer with us. Brave men! I shall lead you! Follow me!"

This was more than anything the Grenadiers could have dreamed of. Here he was, curveting in front of them on his tall horse, his face pale and dusty, his eyes flashing, his Stars glittering on his breast. "Bagrattion himself!" The faces of the soldiers lit up with joy and enthusiasm.

"Hurrah!" they shouted. "Lead us, father! We'll fight to the death!"

The drums beat. The Grenadiers tilted their bayonets and marched forward with even, measured tread. In that instant the earth trembled again from the thunder of artillery, and hell raged again over the heads of the Grenadiers. The rear fortifications of the *flèches* were obscured by dense clouds of dust. As these clouds dispersed, row after row of communication trenches became exposed, filled with hundreds of dead bodies of Frenchmen.

"Thanks! Thanks to the artillery, the shield of the Grenadiers!" shouted the soldiers.

And they continued to advance. This attack of a handful of men—for Konovnitsin was leading his Chasseurs and infantry on the flanks and somewhat to the rear—with the Commander-in-Chief at their head, presented a most extraordinary spectacle. It is doubtful whether at any previous time, even in the fiercest battles, had soldiers charged with such iron, inexorable determination. It is doubtful whether any previous Commander-in-Chief, forgetting all thought of himself, paying no heed to what was before or behind him, had galloped like a subaltern into the jaws of death, crushing his foes under his horse's hoofs, hacking at them with his sword and overthrowing everything that crossed his path as Bagrattion did that day. It was an attack as impetuous as a whirlwind and as magnificent as a thunderstorm! They reached the guns, the Russian guns which had been left in the *flèches* during the retreat and had kept on firing at the enemy to the very last moment, just as Bagrattion had ordered. It cannot be said that Olferyev noticed this, or attached any importance to it if he did. He was in that state when the eyes do not see; when through the glare and fog that surrounds a man impressions crowd upon him as in a dream or in delirium. The guns had not been spiked by the French—the latter had had no time to do so. Nor were they turned against the Russians—the French had had no time to fire them. Was it because of the absence of shells? . . . Bagrattion and Kutaissov were right! These guns had done their utmost. They had inflicted on the French all the damage they had been capable of and had now returned to their own side without having even by a single shot failed in their duty. Verily it seemed as though even as captives they had continued to fight their new masters, refusing to submit to an alien will. . . . Guns animated by loyalty. . . . A miracle!

Olferyev pulled himself together. No, this had not been a miracle! But the courage of the Russian men, their valour and magnificent spirit—these were miracles. On the bronze body of a gun, embracing the barrel with his right arm—the left being roughly bandaged with strips torn from his shirt—lay a gunner with large black side whiskers. His skull was split right down to the neck, and his brain, a grey, bloody mess, had stuck to the gun-barrel. This was the man who had prevented the guns from being turned against their own side. This was the man who had inspired their bronze hearts with deathless devotion! Why, it was Travin's man! The one whose friendship Travin had offered him. It was he! And Olferyev had rejected this man's friendship! Good God! The Cornet felt his face flush with shame. Good God! Tears rolled down his cheeks. . . . He let the reins slip from his hand. His horse stumbled over a broken wheel, reared and leaped over a Russian officer who was sitting on the ground leaning against a gun carriage. In his left hand he held a sword; his head, with its crown of black hair, drooped low on his breast. He slowly raised his right hand. On it two fingers were missing. Travin! Olferyev jumped from his horse and ran to the Lieutenant. Travin was wounded in the chest. He was faint from loss of blood, but still conscious. He recognized Olferyev. An expression of joy flashed across his stern, smoke-begrimed, pallid face.

"Friend," he whispered with great effort. "Tell the Prince that I did not withdraw the guns. . . . Stood to the last. . . . Waited for our infantry. . . . They arrived. . . ."

Olferyev pressed the hand with the missing fingers to his lips. Two Cossacks from Bagrattion's escort watched the scene with curiosity.

"Carry the Lieutenant out of the battle!" Olferyev ordered them.

The Cossacks hastened to Travin and in an instant had him on the saddle of a riderless horse that was galloping by. Soon Travin was out of the Cornet's sight. Olferyev galloped off in search of Bagrattion. He found him on the rear ridge of the middle *flèche*.

"Bayonets!" commanded Prince Peter Ivanovich in a ringing voice.

The bayonets glinted in the hands of the Grenadiers and squelched as they twisted in the bodies of the French linesmen.

"Now you'll sing to a different tune!" roared Tregulyaev, working furiously with bayonet and butt, crushing the skulls of the French. "Take that, and that!"

Even when a linesman fell, waving his arms helplessly, Tregulyaev could not refrain from uttering a biting quip:

"Oh, you boob! Looking for your mittens when you've got, 'em stuck in your belt!"

Suddenly Tregulyaev's own weapon dropped to the ground. Deathly pale he stretched out the bloody stump of his arm and saw, with horror, the white bone protruding from the end. His hand had been lopped clean off by a mighty blow of a sabre. Tregulyaev gazed at the bleeding stump for several moments and then wailed with pain and grief:

"Oh, my hand, my poor little hand!"

He waved the stump again, and again repeated in a wailing voice: "Oh, my poor little hand!"

Brezgun stooped, picked up Tregulyaev's musket and wiped the blood from it with his sleeve. His large eyes expressed infinite sympathy for his wounded comrade. Wishing to soothe the poor fellow he said, shouting to make himself heard above the din:

"I'm sorry for your hand, Maximych, but look at all these chaps lying around knocked out for good, they don't complain!"

He said this as guilelessly as if he were talking in barracks over a glass of tea, but astonishing as it may seem, these simple words roused a happy smile on the faces of the men who were engaged in the bloody scrimmage that was raging all around.

"Well, I'm the boob now!" said Tregulyaev, and hunching his shoulders in the queerest fashion, he began to pick his way out of the scrimmage.

By Brezgun's side was Starynchuk gritting his teeth and working like a demon. Every bayonet thrust at the French performed a double function: firstly, it assuaged the sense of loss of the dear ones he had left at home; secondly, it helped to win for him the much desired St. George's Cross. In his long mighty arms his bayonet glinted like the axe of a woodsman in the forest. His face was flushed and perspiring from exertion, but he felt no weariness. On the contrary, his strength seemed to grow every minute, as if he were absorbing fresh vigour from the earth on which he stood. The Carabineers fighting on each side of him were unable to restrain their admiration and involuntarily they exclaimed:

"Look at him! Look what he's doing, the devil take him! Why the ground's all black and wet around him!"

And so Starynchuk went on earning his St. George's Cross until his musket broke at the stock and he himself fell. As he fell, he felt something fresh, like a breeze, blow across his face. After that—oblivion. A few moments later, he raised his head and sat up. He did not understand what had happened to him and he felt no pain. Looking round he saw two French Musketeers making for him with tilted bayonets. He jumped to his feet—noticing with amazement that he was covered with blood—clutched the two bayonets, one in each hand, broke one of them in half, tore the other from the musket and began to ply the latter with such deadly effect that in an instant he had a French officer and several soldiers lying prostrate around him. But again something strange happened: his arms became numbed, his heart leapt, his head swam—and he crashed to the ground.

* * *

The attack had been going on for about fifteen minutes and scarcely any Frenchmen were left in the middle *flèche*. Konovnitsin was operating successfully on the left and right. Vassilchikov was leading the cavalry. Bagrattion saw the shining copper emblems on the Cuirassiers' helmets and heard the blowing of the trumpets. His face beamed with joy.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, waving his hat on the point of his sword.

The cavalry were advancing in squadrons, with large intervals between them. The Cuirassiers mounted on tall black horses, gave the impression of a black avalanche as they dashed towards the *flèches*.

"Hurrah!"

Prince Peter Ivanovich was now almost certain that the desperate operation he had launched would rectify, compensate with the glory of victory, the unfortunate loss of the *flèches*. His chest rose and fell as he breathed with pride and exultation.

"Hurrah!"

Just then he felt a frightful blow, like a powerful electric shock in the right leg. He swayed in his saddle and dropped his sword and hat. His dark curly hair stood on end, his swarthy face paled, his eyes rolled up, filled with tears and blood. He bit his dry lips until the blood ran. His leg dangled helplessly near the stirrup. Below the knee, at the bend of the legging of his shiny riding boot, crimson shreds of muscle and the jagged ends of white bone protruded. The side of Bagrattion's horse was stained with a steaming scarlet patch—Prince Peter Ivanovich's blood was hot—and the patch spread as the moments flitted by.

"Your Excellency!" cried Olferyev in horror. "Oh, Your Excellency! What has happened?"

He gripped Bagrattion round the waist and felt the Prince trembling and irresistibly slipping from the saddle to the ground.

"Your Excellency!"

"It's . . . no . . . nothing, my heart!" gasped Bagrattion. "I . . . only . . . hope . . . the . . . men . . . have . . . not . . . seen it!"

He turned to the soldiers and mustering all his strength he cried:

"Forward, my friends! Forward! Finish them off, the rascals!"

The Prince imagined that he was shouting very loudly, but actually even Olferyev could barely hear Bagrattion's last command amidst the din of battle. Nobody else heard it. Olferyev could not understand what was going on in his heart at the time, nor could he recall it afterwards. But he was conscious of one thing: if he could remain in this state for the rest of his life he would never again be capable of a bad or dubious thought, let alone of a bad or dubious action.

Nobody but Olferyev heard Bagrattion's last command, but many of those in the vicinity saw him suddenly turn pale and saw the blood spurting from the shattered leg. And although Prince Peter's horse was still prancing and curveting, and although the long, black curly hair so familiar to every soldier in the Russian Army was still waving in the wind on that glorious head, the frightful news of the disaster spread among the troops like wildfire. The attackers wavered and hesitated.

Something quite unprecedented had happened! Bagrattion had spent a quarter of a century in the fire of gruesome battles, and never had a fragment of enemy lead or iron dared to touch him. A quarter of a century! The soldiers really believed that their beloved commander was invulnerable. And this belief was shared by others besides the soldiers! And now, here he was, with a shattered leg! . . . He was lowered from the saddle and laid on an outspread greatcoat. . . . He rose on his elbow and looked around, his large black eyes filled with sadness. The surgeons, who seemed to have sprung out of the earth, crowded round him in their dark uniforms like a screen. They attempted to place him on a stretcher, but he angrily shook his head. No! He had never lain on a stretcher, and never would! He would walk! . . . And indeed, he took a step forward, but in an instant his face became deathly pale and his curly head drooped to his chest. The pain was excruciating. He would have fallen had not Olferyev, "Makarelli" and the surgeons caught him under the arms. Then he was led—or rather dragged—from the line of fire, pitifully hopping on one leg, the other dragging helplessly behind him. His eyes closed from the sudden weakness that had overcome him. . . .

The attack was repulsed all along the line.

* * *

Before the edge of the firing zone was reached Klingfer galloped up to the sad procession. Recognizing the General who was being supported under his arms as the Commander-in-Chief of the Second Army, he saluted with his sword and turned to ride off again. Bagrattion was evidently severely wounded! He was scarcely in a condition to receive reports! . . . But Klingfer was mistaken. Prince Peter Ivanovich raised his head and gazed at the Captain, his eyes clouded by suffering.

"What have you brought?" he enquired in a barely audible voice.

"The Ismailov Lifeguards, the Lithuanian and Finnish Regiments, three regiments of the lst Cuirassier Division, and two batteries of the Guards Artillery, Your Excellency!" answered Klingfer.

"Splendid!" whispered Bagrattion.

Suddenly his voice grew stronger. He straightened up, supported himself firmly on his sound leg and said:

"Convey to the Minister these few words of mine: 'Thanks . . . and apologies! A great deal . . . a very great deal now rests in his hands. May God protect him!'"

* * *

Bennigsen and Tol were leading the troops of the 2nd and 4th Corps to the left flank with the utmost speed, themselves galloping at the head of the main column. Behind them rattled the artillery companies with the gun crews riding on the ammunition boxes, gun carriages and horses. The infantry, looking like massed clouds, rushed with flying colours into the fray with a deafening "Hurrah!" The troops had already passed Rayevsky's battery and were opposite the Shevardino redoubt when the front ranks were amazed and horrified to see Bagrattion. The effect this had upon them was so appalling that the furiously galloping artillery and the charging infantry pulled up short and the sweeping avalanche of many thousands of men came to a halt behind the immovable wall of the front units.

A murmur spread among the troops. Only a few could see Prince Peter, but all had, in a flash, learnt of the disaster that had befallen the Russian Army.

"*Les troupes restent sans chef et sans ordres*",* said Bennigsen to Tol in an undertone, and turning to the troops commanded:

"Shun!"

Tol, his face deathly pale, removed his hat. And the troops removed their shakos as if at prayer parade. The regimental colours fluttered above this sea of bared heads. Suddenly the drums began to beat and the colours were slowly lowered. The Russian Army took leave of its leader, saluting him by drooping the symbols of their greatness and their glory. . . .

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* The troops have been left without a commander and without orders.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

To Her Highness, Anna Dmitrievna Muratova, in the city of St. Petersburg, at the Five Corners, in the House of Madame Lezzano.

Netti, my dear sister. Never have I begun to write a letter in such low spirits, and with such gaps in my thoughts and feelings, as at present. My impressions outnumber the words with which I can express them. They are so great that no words can describe them. I am convinced now that men may experience far more than they can relate and that their greatest experiences die with them. . . .

St. Petersburg, of course, already knows about the great battle that was fought in the field of Borodino. I was in the midst of that inferno during the entire first half of the 26th of August. What a battle that was! Here indeed words fail me. We fought as if every single one of us was fighting for victory. We and our foes fought so hard that the two armies were shattered against each other. In that hour we realized to what heights man may be exalted by valour. No sacrifice is worthier than those we make for the sake of our country. In its defence we learnt to acquire contempt for death, patience and steadfastness; and the field of Borodino is covered with immortal glory!

. . . .

. . . My father and friend, my beloved commander, was wounded at about 12 o'clock. Choking with grief, I accompanied him from the battlefield to the dressing station. The road from the village of Semyonovskoye, near which we had fought, was encumbered by broken guns and ammunition carts, ambulances, and hundreds of baggage carts. Some of the wounded were carried on stretchers, others walked unaided. They were immediately placed in ambulances. All around were lying the dead bodies of men who had been carried out at the very beginning of the battle . . . .

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It is easier to be six hours in battle than six minutes at a dressing station. Pools of blood all around, some red and warm others black and already congealed. The groans of the wounded rise to the sky. The surgeons are at work with their coats off, in aprons, with their sleeves rolled up to their elbows. The air in the place is acrid—the odours of blood and gunpowder fumes give it the flavour of vinegar . . . .

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. . . . . . Soon after we arrived, Count Saint-Priest, Chief of Staff of the Second Army, was brought to the dressing station with a bullet wound in the chest. He was conscious. He even showed me the hole the bullet had made in his coat, and the wound itself. The wound was not severe or painful in itself, but it had caused considerable loss of blood, and this had weakened the Count very considerably. On hearing Saint-Priest's voice my Prince opened his eyes and enquired in a very low voice:

"Who is in command on the left flank?"

"General Konovnitsin. In temporary command," answered the Count.

"Who is to take over command?"

"Dokhturov."

The Prince sighed and said a little louder:

"Thank God! Moscow is saved!"

And then, again in a very low voice, he said:

"You are wounded, Count? You are honourably serving Russia . . . . Thank you and . . . forgive!"

The Prince's distrust of him had always oppressed Saint-Priest. He had tried to win the Prince's confidence but had been unsuccessful. Blood had proved the worth of one and had reconciled both. I saw tears of gratitude and joy streaming from Saint-Priest's beautiful blue eyes . . . .

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. . . . . Madame de Staël said somewhere that a man on a wild horse or in the prow of a canoe presents a magnificent picture. It is a pity this lady has not seen our wounded soldiers. Anything more magnificent than these there cannot be! Take, for example, the young Carabineer, a veritable giant, whom I saw sitting on the grass under a tree with a surgeon busy by his side. A bullet had struck the poor fellow in the forehead and had lodged in the bone. His face was pale, but he sat motionless, looking straight before him. First the surgeon tried to prize the lead out with an awl. He struggled and struggled with this instrument until he ripped open almost half the Carabineer's forehead, which was swollen and inflamed, but the bullet would not budge. The surgeon then took up another instrument and said with the utmost coolness:

"We will saw it out, saw it out, brother!"

I could hear the steel grating on the bone. The saw bent. But the bullet stuck fast. Tears rolled from the Carabineer's large, wide open eyes, but not a muscle of his face moved. At last the surgeon wearied of his efforts. His face was flushed and perspiring. He threw his instrument aside in disgust and said:

"What's to be done, brother? Rest a bit. . . . Then we'll try again!"

The martyr rose and thanking his torturer politely said:

"Oh, let it stay, Mr. Surgeon. . . . A bit of lead won't do me any harm!"

With that he lay down in the shade and covered himself with his greatcoat. I enquired what the name of this hero was. I was told that it was Starynchuk, and I was also told his story. I recollected something and took certain measures. In all probability the St. George's Cross now decorates the Carabineer's breast. . . . .

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. . . . . The surgeons examined my Prince's frightful wound. Notwithstanding the excruciating pain caused by their cruel manipulations, he did not groan once—he merely bit the amber mouthpiece of his pipe through and through. The surgeons were unanimous in the opinion that unless the leg was amputated below the knee gangrene was inevitable.

When the Prince was informed of this he rolled his eyes angrily and said:

"I will not allow it! What is life to me without a leg!"

And the surgeons yielded, knowing how stubborn the Prince was, and how untamable was his wrath . . . .

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. . . . . Right until the evening Golitsin and I eagerly clutched at every rumour that came from the field of Borodino. Some of these we communicated to the Prince, others we withheld from him. After midday we heard about Marshal Ney's attacks on the village of Semyonovskoye, how the Ismailov, Lithuanian and Finnish Guards Regiments valiantly repulsed the French Cuirassiers, about the gigantic infantry and cavalry clashes, and about General Konovnitsin's brilliant retreat beyond the village. Soon after rumours reached us to the effect that the French had captured Rayevsky's battery, and that General Yermolov, who was in the vicinity, had recaptured it, together with the French General Bonamy. In this battle, in which Yermolov displayed incredible valour and initiative and his troops devoted courage, the young commander of artillery of the First Army, Count Kutaissov, the flower of our Generals, the hope and future glory of our country, perished. His horse returned without its rider, the saddle drenched with blood. How could I convey this dreadful news to my Prince? I did not hesitate, however, to report to him in all detail Platov's attack on the French left flank, and how it wavered under the threat of our Cossacks' lances. It was solace to my ears to hear my Prince utter a feeble chuckle and whisper gleefully:

"Bravo!"

Of the rest we learned when we were already on our way to Mozhaisk. News of the final loss of Rayevsky's battery, and of the counter-attacks of the Horse Guards—which are worthy of being recorded in the immortal book of fame—reached us when we were half-way on the road. It was then, too, that we heard of the order issued by the Field Marshal of the Army: Retreat! . . . .

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. . . . . It is difficult to imagine a sadder scene than the one we witnessed on the road between Borodino and Mozhaisk. The artillery galloped along the highroad in several rows, their horses covered with dust and foam. Columns of infantry hurried along, one behind another. Thousands of men, with different coloured coat collars, their faces haggard and blood-stained, wandered about searching for their regiments. The cavalrymen could barely keep in their saddles. Pack horses, baggage carts, an endless train of ambulances filled with wounded crowded the road, colliding with each other and crawling along in great disorder. Despondency after the most radiant hopes, gloomy silence after the thunder of Borodino, dull indifference after the most thrilling excitement—such was the spirit that reigned on this road. The sky was grey and lowering, discharging a fine drizzle, as if weeping over Russia's grief. . . . .

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. . . . Around Mozhaisk, and in the streets and squares of the town itself, fires were burning at which wounded men were sitting and lying. Shrieks, groans and curses rent the cold night air. All the side streets were filled with carriages, ammunition and provision carts and pack horses carrying canteen equipment, giving the impression that a fair was in progress in the town. We stopped at a tavern, where frightful disorder reigned. Wounded men were lying in the kitchen and the billiard room, on and under the table. They wanted to remove these men, but the Prince would not permit it. He did not sleep all night, or even close his eyes. I am not sure whether he actually saw what he gazed at so intently. His fever rose, but he was not delirious. He remained quite silent, and Golitsin and I sat at his bedside waiting impatiently for the dawn. When day broke a long train of wounded entered Mozhaisk; and behind it came the Army. Up to now we had been travelling in a large open barouche. We resumed our journey in a closed carriage. . . . .

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. . . . . It was midday when we entered Moscow. Instead of the usual large military guard, a few disabled soldiers and militiamen, in coats of coarse grey cloth and with bronze crosses in their hats, stood at the gates. The streets were deserted. The shutters of the houses were closed and most of the gates were boarded up. Not a soul was seen at the windows. Army baggage carts, ambulance carts and private equipages—carriages, dormeuses and barouches were streaming from the city. Many of the inhabitants were riding in ordinary carts, or proceeded on foot with knapsacks on their backs. Soon a crowd gathered round our carriage. Glancing through the windows and seeing the pale, half-conscious face of the Prince, the women wailed and sobbed and the men cursed the French. I drew the curtains. And so we reached Presnya, where, at last we drew up at the house of the Princes Gruzinsky. The house was deserted. . . . .

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. . . . . The Moscow-Mozhaisk Road is a dirt road, lined by high banks, and in wet weather is extremely muddy and rough. The tiring journey had greatly aggravated my Prince's wound. His fever rose. He began to moan with pain, and often became unconscious. The house in which we put up, a large wooden structure with numerous, spacious and comfortable rooms, seemed to be filled with the most famous physicians in Moscow and littered with basins, washstands, bandages, lint and surgical instruments. The physicians consulted with one another with a mysterious air, as if they were conferring with death. One of them, a celebrated surgeon, spoke with such slow deliberation that one could have read a whole page of a novel during the pauses between each sentence. This did not prevent him, however, according to repute, from amputating a leg or an arm with amazing celerity. This celebrated Hippocrates stated that gangrene and the death of my Prince were inevitable unless the lower part of his leg was immediately removed. Another celebrated physician, who wore a frock-coat and grey trousers and smoked a German porcelain pipe, confirmed this. The others dared not dispute it. Unfortunately a rash appeared round the edges of the Prince's wound. The physicians ordered powdered alum to be applied, but this caused the Prince excruciating pain. To assuage it they applied cantharides. The Prince's condition grew worse . . . .

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. . . . . Despatch riders kept arriving from the Army. To prevent the Prince from being disturbed, Golitsin and I decided not to allow them to come into the house, but to receive them on the porch. We were eager to receive the news they brought, for we could get no intelligible or anything like precise information from Count Rostopchin, the Governor-General of Moscow. He is very witty and talkative, but crafty and evasive to a degree. It was essential for us, however, to know in what danger Moscow stood, and how imminent that danger was. In the morning of August 31, a despatch rider from the Army was announced. I went out on the porch and saw a man with a very hairy face, small eyes and a hawk nose. He carried his left arm in a sling, one side of his face was bandaged, and his hat was drawn low over the forehead. He was mounted on a shaggy Don pony, the saddle cloth of which was all awry and the bit was fastened with string.

"Who are you?" I enquired.

"Lieutenant of the Don Troops, Kuzma Ivlyev Vorozheikin!" he answered. "I have brought a message from Lieutenant-Colonel Davidov's partisan unit. Denis Vassilyevich is in great grief . . . shedding tears for the Prince. And I too . . . poor sinner. . . ." And here the Lieutenant burst into tears like a child, and so unrestrained that I could scarcely keep back my own. I read Davidov's message, hastily scribbled a reply and said:

"Take this, Mr. Lieutenant!"

This should have ended the interview, but the Cossack showed no sign of departing. Instead, he drew a small, greasy linen bag from his bosom with an air of awe and naive confusion which the abundance of hair on his face could not conceal. He crossed himself, whispered something over the bag, kissed it, handed it to me and stammered:

"For the wound. . . . Put it on . . . May the earth swallow me if it does not heal it in a trice! Please, Mr. Adjutant, be so kind and take it!"

"But what is it?" I asked.

"A charm. . . . Earth from the Don. . . . Stops the pain. . . . Takes it all away! Do be kind and take it! Our fathers and grandfathers used it. . . . Acts without fail, I assure you, your honour!"

In his agitation he forgot that he himself was an officer, and again tears rolled down his rugged face.

"Does the Prince know you?" I asked.

"God knows whether he remembers me. . . . I am Vorozheikin, Kuzma Ivlyev. . . . The one who had the misfortune to kill Mr. Muratov". . . . . .

. . . .

. . . . Davidov informed us in his message that it had been decided to surrender Moscow, and so we had to leave. But where were we to go?

Andrei Golitsin, who in spite of his frivolity was almost prostrate with grief, proposed that we should take the Prince to his father's estate in Simi, near Vladimir. His father, Prince Boris Andreyevich, was commander of the Militia of three gubernias and was therefore away from home, visiting his various commands. But Princess Anna Alexandrovna, my Prince's aunt, was in Simi. This haven, though not far away, was remote from danger, and tranquillity and solicitude were assured. Furthermore, Andreyevskoye, the estate of Count Mikhail Semyonovich Vorontsov, was only a few versts from Simi. Being extremely wealthy, he had established there a large army hospital, with numerous physicians and all the necessary medical supplies. Vorontsov had gone there to have his own wound treated and had taken Count Saint-Priest with him. Andrei Golitsin's proposal, therefore, seemed the best that could be conceived of, and so we decided to go to Simi without revealing to the Prince the disastrous cause of our flight from Moscow.

On the 1st of September, just before midday, the Prince opened his eyes, which were weary with fever and pain. I gave him a few biscuits on a plate and a glass of water. He took a few sips and seemed refreshed. I don't remember what excuse Golitsin and I had concocted for our immediate departure. It was an inspiration born of despair! He consented to leave. We started out in a four-seater carriage drawn by six horses, with outriders, a postilion and two footmen at the rear. The streets were even more deserted than they had been on the day we arrived. The common people gathered in groups, anxiously questioned each other and then parted, each going his separate way. Sometimes they entered into long conversation. They talked of the battle of Borodino, of how our troops were hastening to cover Moscow, and of the battle that would be fought for the city. And they armed themselves with whatever came to hand in order to take part in this battle. I saw no sign either of police or Cossack patrols. As we passed through the gates the Prince signed to me. I bent towards him.

"Alyosha," he said in a barely audible voice. "You should not have taken me away, my heart."

"Why, Your Excellency?"

"I must perish, because my country is perishing. . . . .

. . . .

. . . . Night was falling when Golitsin and I, glancing through the back window of the carriage, witnessed a gruesome sight. Dark clouds were hovering over Moscow and spreading across the sky they changed their shape and became more and more dense. We looked at each other with horror and amazement, not daring to exchange opinions. It grew dark. The clouds assumed a pinkish hue, then they became darker, turned crimson and, at last, spread in a tremendous glare through which gigantic columns of flame shot into the sky. A sea of fire raged on the horizon beyond which Moscow lay. . . . .

. . . .

. . . . . I cannot imagine anything more depressing and frightful than that night. Only a little while ago we were dreaming of glory and of success! Only a little while ago! But where were these dreams now? When would they return? Dark night enveloped us! We were wandering, we knew not whither. Where would the rays of dawn find us at the break of day? Would it break? How many times had my heart been deceived by hope?

But we shall take revenge! In the sacred desire for vengeance lies the source of our glory and future greatness. In spite of all that is going on around me I say: Sooner or later the glare of Smolensk and Moscow will illumine our road to Paris. The war is becoming a people's war. Does that not imply that all the enemy's misdeeds are futile, and that all his crimes will meet with just retribution? The hour of redemption is nigh! The blow will be parried, and will strike the guilty. We shall wipe out the traces of the aliens' invasion with their own blood!

And Moscow? It will rise from the ashes, beautiful, endowed with riches, forever radiant with new glory of great sacrifice. It will not forget the days of grief and desolation, but will take pride in them. I know that the burning of Moscow was the work of a few, but the idea belongs to all!

Vengeance, my sister! Vengeance!

Yours,
A. O.

September 4, 1812
Pokrov Station.

P. S. A wounded Horse Guards officer at Platovo Station gave me some news. . . . Supreme justice is being administered not only in the destiny of the world, but also in that of my humble self. Klingfer fell a victim to one of the last shots fired in the battle of Borodino. I am alive—he is dead! Our duel is over. But for the sake of all that you hold sacred do not think that I am grateful to Heaven for this issue. I implore you not to think so! I myself do not understand what is going on in my heart. Words fail me, but my grief is immeasurable. Oh, if only I could meet Travin!

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Only another ten or twelve versts remained to reach Simi, but the road was still rough and intersected by exposed tree-roots. It ran through a dense wood, where the trees grew so closely together and were so tall that the place was plunged in gloom even on a bright midday. The profound silence was broken only by the song of birds, and by the gusts of wind which blew through the tops of the birches and pines, causing them to sway and rustle.

Near Simi, however, the wood thinned out, and when the road turned to the right glimpses could be obtained of the river winding in the broad valley, of the manor house, the park and the pond girded by a wall of reeds. The pond was covered with a white carpet of water-lilies, their round leaves lying motionless on its unruffled surface. The sun was setting. Twilight descended on the countryside. A light mist rose from the ground. To the right of the road, beyond the high bank, a smaller pond glistened and two rows of willows gazed dreamily into the water. At the bridge lined with lamp-posts the willows gave way to birches. The carriage rolled along this avenue for a considerable time, swaying heavily on its springs, the wheels softly rattling over the cobbles. When, at last, it stopped at the manor house it was quite dark. The terrace was lit by the brilliant light that streamed from the open windows of the upper storey.

Who can tell how all the inmates of this vast house learned at once of the great misfortune that had pulled up at the terrace? Before it had time to knock, the door was flung open and they all poured out to meet it. Soon a large throng gathered round the carriage. The first to appear were the footmen in green coats; then came the staid chambermaids in dark dresses and large white caps, and lastly, Princess Anna Alexandrovna descended the high staircase at an unusually rapid pace, convulsively gripping the marble balustrade with one hand and covering her face with the other. The old oak had not bent to the wind. Her step was as firm as ever, but hot tears dripped one after another on the hand of Karelin, who was supporting her.

"Prince Makarelli" pressed his mother's hand to his lips, and she nodded to him now and again, as if from a distance, although she was standing right beside him. Her eyes were riveted on a long, dark object that was being removed from the carriage.

"Prince Peter!" she cried suddenly in that shrill guttural voice in which women of the Orient shriek when their hearts are torn by grief and despair, "Prince Peter!" and she sank slowly into the arms of her son.

Bagrattion was carried into a large, darkened room. Its silence was disturbed by the hurried, incoherent words, soundless, like the muttering of phantoms, which Bagrattion uttered in his delirium. Prince Peter imagined that he saw a blind man walking in the distance, stumbling and groping with his hands. "Aha!" he muttered, "this is Life approaching!" He felt a pair of sombre eyes gazing at him coldly and pitilessly. "This is Fate staring at me," he said with a sigh. But near him stood a kind, motherly old soul, who must have had many children, all of whom needed her care and attention, yet she found time to devote to him. "Good, kind, old lady! Who can she be?" he asked himself. Then he muttered with calm satisfaction: "Why, it is Death, come for me!"

* * *

With trembling hands the family doctor, wearing low, tasseled Hussar's riding boots, opened packets of white soothing powders—opium. Hemlock was being boiled for compresses, which had had a beneficial effect upon the wound for three whole days. Meanwhile Karelin had galloped off in an empty tarantass to Andreyevskoye to bring a surgeon. In a corner of the room where Bagrattion was lying in delirium a little man with black curly hair was kneeling, his body shaken by irresistible sobs. So violent was his emotion that the folds of his blue velvet coat flapped on the parquet floor. His olive face was distorted by grief.

"Who are you?" Olferyev asked him.

"Battaglia," answered the little man, "His Highness's man-servant.... Oh, sir, I could not have grieved so much on the day Christ was buried as I grieve today!"

* * *

Three days passed. During this period Bagrattion's condition took a turn for the better. On the last night the dark patches, ominous harbingers of gangrene, disappeared, the excruciating pain ceased, the fever subsided. The physicians from Andreyevskoye no longer whispered with a frightened and mysterious air in the corners of the room. They no longer pronounced the word "amputation." They now talked of other things: splints, crutches, fresh air. . . .

Golitsin's study, in which Prince Peter Ivanovich was lying, had four windows looking out on the garden, and its cosiness gladdened the heart. Splendid weather set in.The sun,though not very warm,was extremely bright. Its cold rays played on the hill which shut out the horizon. The shadows of the hill fell in fantastic patterns on the meadows and trees, leaving bright patches here and there. Between the sun and the windows, century-old pine trees were swaying, and this caused the patches of sunlight to race over the grass, so that the room was now brightly lit and now in deep shade. This continuous change strangely affected the eyes: one wanted to close them. Prince Peter scarcely opened his; but he listened intently to the rustling of the trees, to the cries of the orioles, and particularly to what people were saying. He asked no questions, but everybody in the house knew that mentally he was impatiently and eagerly asking only one question: "What about Moscow?" Princess Anna Alexandrovna had given strict instructions to withhold from him the news of the fate of Moscow. Concerning the capital she said with a calm and satisfied air: "Bonaparte has blundered! Now he will have to remain where he is until winter!" The patient was not allowed to see any newspapers. Nearly every day five or six neighbouring squires would drive up in their carriages to pay their respects to Prince Peter and to enquire about his health. Some of them were permitted to see him, but so sternly were they told to hold their tongues that they dared not utter a word.

Olferyev spent all his time at his Prince's bedside. Sometimes whole hours would pass in silence; but at other times they would have long, quiet talks on the most surprising subjects. The war was scarcely ever mentioned in these talks. To Olferyev's astonishment Bagrattion betrayed an unprecedented bent for philosophizing. Well though he knew his Prince, he had never suspected that he possessed either the interests or the knowledge that he displayed in these conversations.

"Tell me, my heart," said Bagrattion one day. "Was that ancient sage Seneca really a wise man?"

"He was a philosopher with a great mind," answered Olferyev.

"I asked," continued Prince Peter, "because I recall that somewhere he said: 'Man is higher than the gods; for the gods know not suffering.' Did he say that?"

"Yes, he did!" answered Olferyev, astonished at the question.

"There you are, Alyosha, my heart! I think Seneca's cut at the gods was a very shrewd one. Had he not been a pagan he would not have cut at them so shrewdly." And chuckling quietly to himself he added: "He would have had his tongue cut out."

Battaglia, too, scarcely left the sick man's room. He served the Prince with such readiness and devotion that Olferyev grew to love this vivacious little Italian. Late in the afternoon of a clear bright day, when the sun had only just descended to the summit of the woods, tinting them with that bright, rosy autumn hue which touchingly lights up the faces of those dying from consumption, Prince Peter and Battaglia were alone in the room. Bagrattion looked round and suddenly raised himself on his elbow. His eyes were burning. His cheeks were flushed.

"Listen, Silvio!" he said. "Do you remember the oath I took to die for Russia? I must know. . . . Answer me. . . . The truth! . . . In whose hands is Moscow?"

Had the floor opened under Battaglia's feet and revealed the crater of a volcano belching fire, lava and dust, he would not have felt so near his doom as he did that moment. But then, in all probability, the only means of salvation would not have occurred to him as swiftly as it did on this occasion. He put the palms of his hands together as Catholic priests do in the most solemn moments of Mass, and raising his tearful eyes to the ceiling he said:

"You know, Prince, how firmly I believe in God. I swear to you, swear by the eyes of God, that Moscow is in the hands of the Russians. I swear...."

Prince Peter was now almost sitting up in bed. He riveted his eyes on Battaglia, as if trying to peer into his heart, and his body surged towards him in a passionate and imperative movement.

"You swear? Swear once again!" he demanded.

"I swear by the Cross of the Lord that Moscow is Russian!" said Battaglia in a voice of desperation. "Let the Lord this year send me the worst Christmas I have ever had. . . . Let the Devil spit into my plate. I swear by the key of the Apostle Peter! It is Russian! . . . Russian!"

"Enough!" said Bagrattion in a low voice, falling back on his pillow. "Thank you, Silvio! No, I shall not die of my wound. I shall die . . . for Moscow!"

Battaglia stood at the bedside, covering his face with his hands. "God!" he exclaimed mentally. "Great God! Forgive me for lying like a drunken monk!"

* * *

On the 8th of September Prince Peter woke up early. He felt cheerful; his leg hardly ached at all. The physicians had permitted him to take his first exercise. With the help of Olferyev and "Prince Makarelli" he took a pair of crutches and made several hops to the table to take a cup of coffee and to despatch certain official papers to the Army. Accustomed to unceasing and seething activity, he had found these long days of *far niente** under a downy blanket heavy and dull. The work and the coffee gave a touch of freshness to his haggard face, and his eyes sparkled as of yore.

"Alyosha!" he said. "I've just thought of something! I want to write to Dmitri Sergeyevich Dokhturov. He and I always held the same opinions. I wonder whether it is still the case. Sit down, my heart, as you used to do, and take down what I tell you.

"...I realize, my dear friend, that it is doubtful whether we could have routed Napoleon at Borodino. And it is a good thing that we did not. We achieved the exact degree of success which we needed: no more and no less. Had we hurled Napoleon back from the field of Borodino, he would have retreated to the Dnieper, and the Corps commanded by Victor and Augereau would have joined him there, while we, enfeebled by our dearly bought victory, would have set out in pursuit, and would have followed in his tracks without waiting for reinforcements. The war would have proceeded as all wars proceed and could not have become a people's war, such as it is now. . . . I don't think any good would have come of this. . . .

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* Doing nothing.

"For Bonaparte, however, to achieve the defeat of the Russian Army at Borodino was not enough; it was essential for him to annihilate it. That is why he neglected the rules of the art of war, with which he is so familiar, and launched a frontal attack against us. What was this? Merely a display of arrogance and impudence. He tried to override the rules. He imagined that frontal attacks were a new means of achieving decisive success. Why should he rack his brains since his forces so far outnumbered ours! But he made a mistake in one particular. He failed to take into account the fact that our morale is as high over his as heaven is over the earth."

The letter was finished and even signed when Battaglia burst into the room and announced:

"Your Highness! His Majesty's aide-de-camp, accompanied by Count Saint-Priest from Andreyevskoye!"

Before the Prince could reply the door swung open and the Emperor's messenger strode rapidly into the room. It was the same Colonel with the pasteboard face that seemed indifferent to everything in the world who, at the beginning of the war, had been sent from Imperial Headquarters to Bagrattion in the town of Mir. Behind the Colonel, supported by a footman, slowly hobbled Saint-Priest, pale and thin, looking more handsome than he had been before he was wounded. His Majesty's aide-de-camp halted in the middle of the room and stood to attention in front of the Prince.

"From His Imperial Majesty, Our Most August Sire. . . ." he said, holding out a despatch.

Bagrattion wanted to rise from his chair but was unable to do so. Olferyev took the despatch, opened the envelope, extracted from it a large sheet of thick-blue paper and handed it to Prince Peter. It was a rescript from the Emperor and read as follows:

"Prince Peter Ivanovich! Pleased with your valour and zealous service, I was greatly grieved to hear of the wound which you have received and which has temporarily withdrawn you from the battlefield where, in the present state of military operations, your presence is so necessary and useful. I wish and trust that God will grant you a speedy recovery in order that you may be crowned with new honour and glory. In the meantime, not as a reward for your services, which you will receive at an early date, but as some addition to your competency, I grant you the sum of fifty thousand rubles.

"Remaining your well-wisher,
"Alexander."

Bagrattion kissed the Tsar's signature and laid the blue paper on the table.

"Mind and body, blood and soul—I give it all to my country and to the service of His Majesty," he said, bowing his head.

The aide-de-camp shook hands with the Prince, clinking his spurs and stooping slightly, exactly in the way the Emperor did in similar circumstances. Saint-Priest embraced Prince Peter. The Prince expressed thanks for the congratulations. Turning to Saint-Priest he said cordially:

"How quickly you have recovered, Count, my heart! What miraculous strength men possess! Life creeps and clambers, crawls and leaps—all upwards! And just as it reaches the summit it misses its footing and goes hurtling down. That is death!"

"Why do you speak of death, Prince?" asked Saint-Priest laughing merrily. "Let us rather, you and I, speak in praise of our crutches."

"If it were not for these disgusting sticks I would be in Moscow now," answered the Prince with a grimace. "By the by, Alyosha, my heart, see that the letter is sent to Dokhturov in Moscow today. Don't forget!"

"In Moscow?" asked His Majesty's aide-de-camp in surprise. "Does not Your Highness. . . ."

Olferyev rushed behind Bagrattion's chair and made desperate signs to the Colonel. Saint-Priest, guessing what was in the wind, jumped from his chair and raised both his hands as if wishing to shut the Colonel's mouth. But the aide-de-camp merely shrugged his shoulders and slowly and deliberately finished his question.

" . . . know that the French are in Moscow?"

Even if he had not finished the sentence the irremediable would have happened. The Prince had suspected the worst before this. He sat motionless for several moments, his sallow face paler than ever, a stern frown on his brow. Then he leaped from his chair, flung his crutches aside and swaying, hopped wildly about the room, fiercely stamping his wounded leg. Uttering a cry that was a mixture of a groan and a sob he collapsed in the arms of Olferyev, "Prince Makarelli" and Saint-Priest.

* * *

Again Bagrattion lay in bed in a high fever and delirium, while Karelin was galloping post-haste to Andreyevskoye for the physicians. His Majesty's aide-de-camp expressed great concern for what had happened.

"Why, Madame, did no one warn either me or the Count of the subtle stratagem to which you had resorted?" he asked Princess Anna Alexandrovna in tones of vexation. "Perhaps, knowing His Highness's restless and impatient temper, it would have been wiser to have impressed him with the fact that even Pozharsky in his day was obliged to abandon Moscow, but eventually drove the enemy out. . . .* I undertake. . . ."

"*C'est trop tard, Colonel!*"** said Saint-Priest, and broke into tears.

* * *

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* Prince Pozharsky who, with Minin the Nizhni-Novgorod merchant, led the people's war against the Poles—1611-1612.

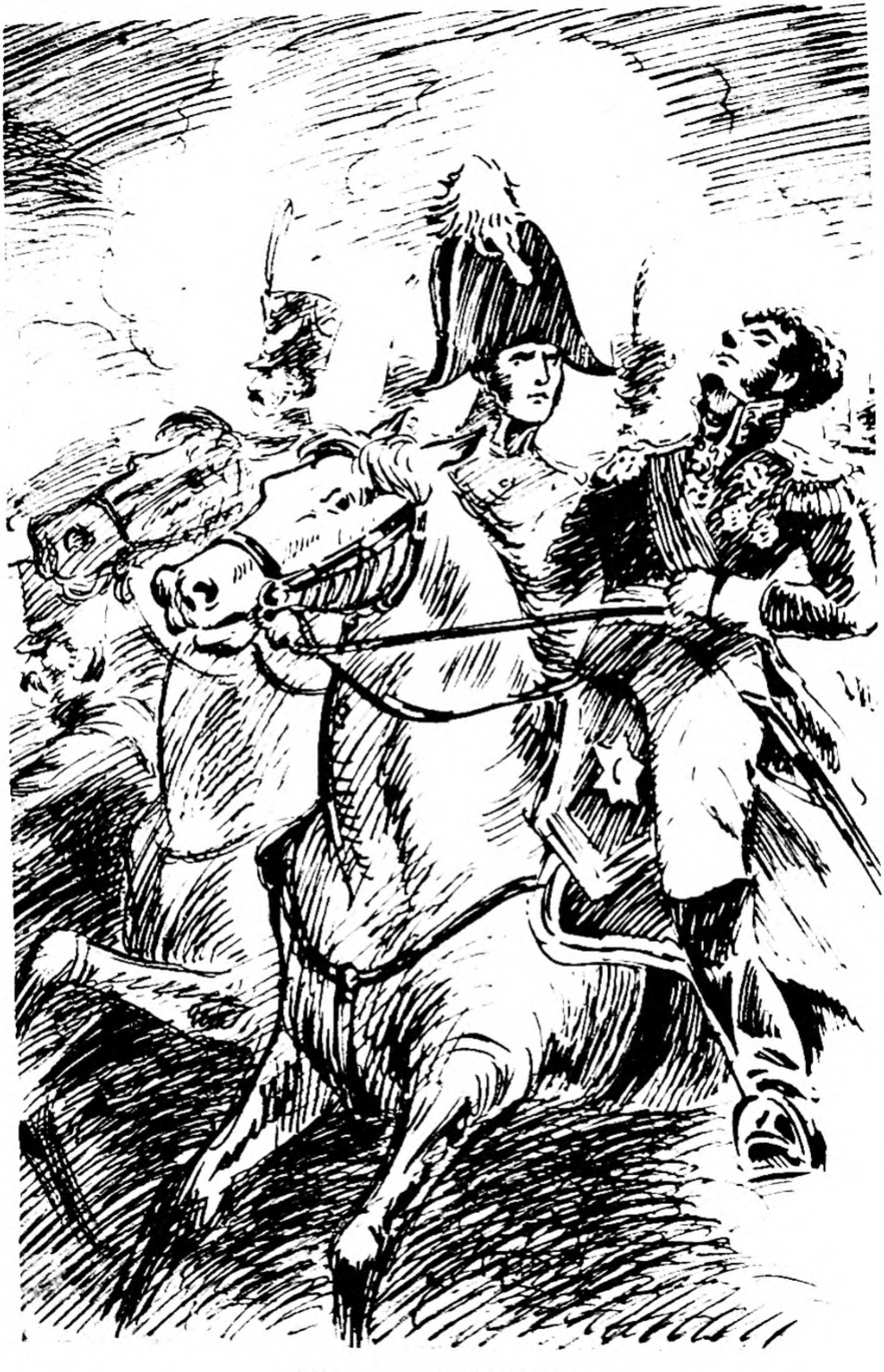
** It is too late, Colonel.

The bronze Arab with the thick lips and white beads round his neck suddenly began to roll his eyes and wag his curly head and the clock he held in his arms began to hiss, ready to strike. Another clock, fitted in a vase containing flowers, a third standing on a bureau, a fourth with chimes, hanging on the wall in the next room, and another somewhere else which played a flute, all swung their pendulums and hissed fiercely on the passing of the last minute of the hour. Suddenly they all began to ring, sing and play, and struck the hour of one. Three bull dogs lying at the door of the study set up a sinister howl and rushed down the corridor out of the house. This was on September the 12th, when Prince Peter Ivanovich Bagrattion died after long-drawn agony.

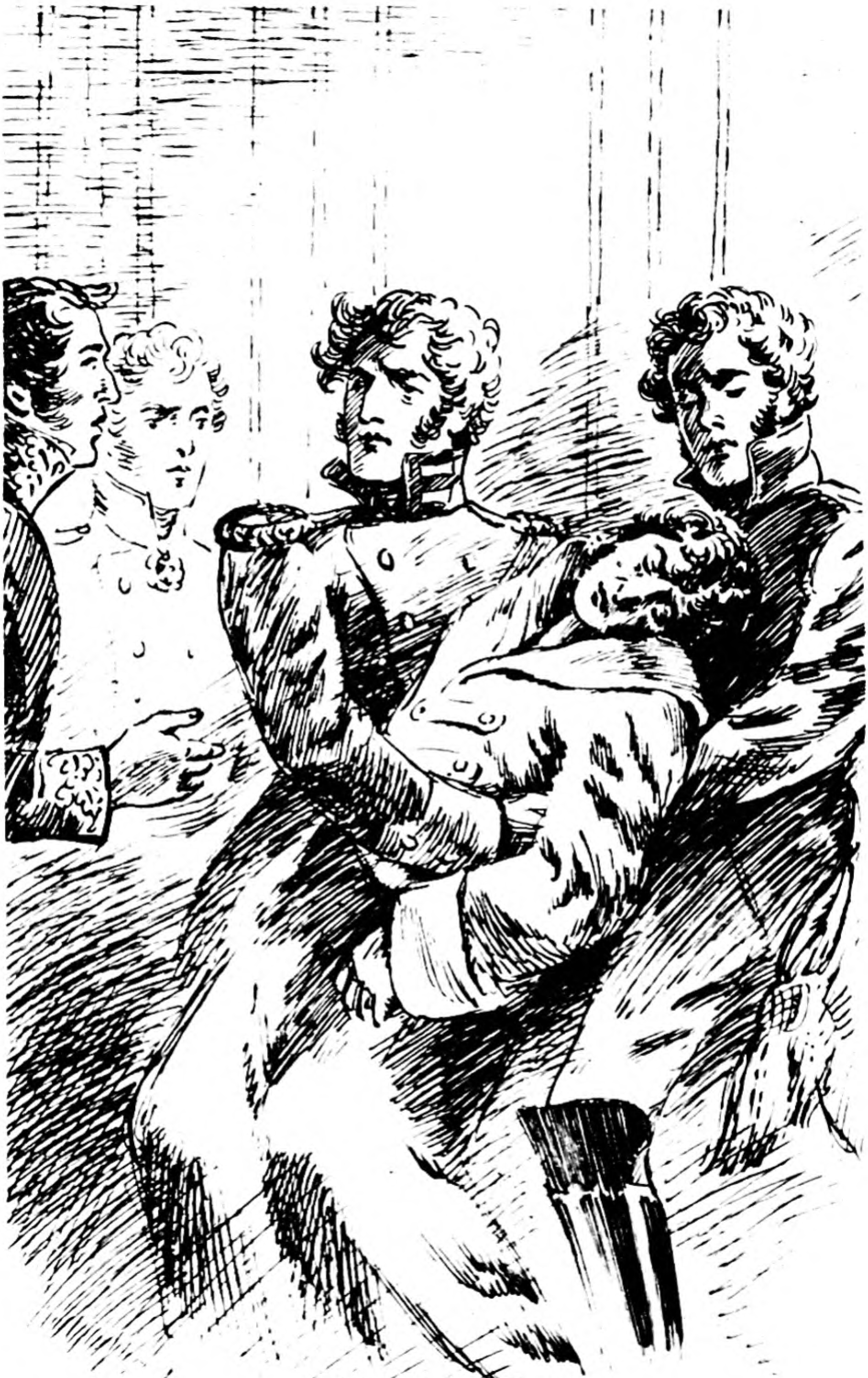
Gangrene which set in, put a stop for ever to his long fighting career. It was difficult to believe that this wonderful man was dead. He had lived as though he had not one, but a thousand bodies, and as many hearts and souls. And he had spent himself with the utmost extravagance, not giving a thought to the end. It had seemed as though nothing could imperil this magnificent life. Who would dare to do so? Nevertheless, it came to an end. The dead man was cold, motionless, stiff and pale, like a stone in the moonlight. The majestic calm of death had obliterated all traces of suffering from his face, and his sharp features reassumed their stern purity, each carved and finished with faultless regularity. It seemed as though the black eyelashes fluttered over his cheeks. His thick, black hair, now slightly streaked with grey, crowned his serene forehead like a dark aureole.

Prince Peter was laid out in great pomp and splendour in the magnificent hall, which was draped with black crêpe. Sentries stood stiffly at his coffin. In the courtyard a guard of honour was drawn up. The deceased no longer asked anything of life. He lay still, but around him there was the noise and bustle of people running about giving orders. This is always the case; the living become overwhelmed with a thousand anxious cares for the dead, and they seem to be deliberately complicating their activities in order to emphasize thereby the difference between themselves—who are capable of running about and giving orders—and the dead—who are no longer capable of doing anything.

It was a typical autumn day when Bagrattion died. The white speckled trunks of the birches could be seen through the sparse, golden leaves of the trees in the park, and the drops of morning mist caught in the forks of the branches glittered like diamonds. The willows behind the house had shed all their leaves. One of them, uprooted by the storm, was lying prostrate on the ground. The wind howled over the lifeless fields. . . .



"He swayed in his saddle"



"Uttering a cry that was a mixture of a groan and a sob he collapsed in the arms of Olferyev"

EPILOGUE

The spring came very late in eighteen hundred and thirty-nine. Although April was already drawing to a close the rivers in the Simbirsk Gubernia were still in full flood, carrying spawn and clumps of unmelted snow. In the fields, patches of thawed earth showed only here and there. Then came strong warm winds and heavy rain, and in the evenings the starling nest boxes nailed high up on the trees rang with the joyous screeching of the birds.

Squire Denis Vassilyevich Davidov, Lieutenant-General of Cavalry, retired, of the village of Verkhnaya Maza, in the Syzran Uyezd, stood at the window of his house and gazed at the muddy road. This was on April 21, the day the mail was to arrive, and the old man was waiting impatiently for the return of the messenger he had sent to the station for newspapers, magazines and letters. Davidov had changed a great deal during the twenty-seven years that had elapsed since the great war. The former grey streak of hair had now spread all over his head. His face was sallow and flabby. His once lithe and graceful body had become heavy and obese. But his black eyes still glistened with their erstwhile ardour.

No, brothers, no! A semi-soldier is he
Who by his fireside prefers to be,
With wife, half a dozen heirs,
A bowl of soup, a tot of rum, the sum of all his cares.

This was a verse that he had composed and had given the title: "Semi-Soldier." He had lived in this village for several years already, scarcely ever leaving it. Locking himself up in his study among his books and hunting trophies, he wrote reminiscences, verses and letters to old friends. He told the children stories of the glorious deeds he had performed as a partisan. He rode to hounds for hares, shot snipe, and hunted quails with a hawk. A life of freedom and ease. Who could wish for a better? But Davidov wearied of it. He longed for the hubbub of life and took care that his old St. Petersburg friends did not forget him. For eighteen months he had been persistently bombarding St. Petersburg with letters. In August eighteen hundred and thirty-seven the twenty-fifth anniversary of the battle of Borodino was celebrated. Numerous troops were mustered on the famous battlefield, and the Emperor Nicholas held parades and reviews. For several days after the troops manoeuvred on the site of the great battle and reconstructed its gruesome progress in attacks and retreats. It was then that Davidov conceived the idea of transferring the remains of Prince Peter Ivanovich Bagrattion from Simi, in the Vladimir Gubernia, for internment in the field of Borodino.

The Tsar consented. Everybody approved. The matter had been decided upon long ago, but the wheels moved very slowly. That summer, in eighteen hundred and thirty-nine, it was proposed to unveil a monument on the field of Borodino. What a splendid opportunity this afforded of laying Bagrattion's remains near this monument to his fame! But the correspondence with the various government departments dragged on and there seemed to be no end to it. Davidov had tried to push the matter forward. He had written to Count Karl Fedorovich Tol in St. Petersburg, jogging his memory and demanding his co-operation. The stern Minister had sent polite letters in reply, but nothing came of them. Denis had then tried to get Prince Larion Vasilyevich Vassilchikov, President of the State Council and of the Committee of Ministers, to move in the matter and had written to him about it. The Prince replied expressing readiness to do all that was necessary, but the Ministry for Finance was holding up the necessary funds. Davidov had turned to Zhukovski, who was now tutor to the Heir-Apparent and had easy access to the Tsar. Zhukovski had actually spoken to the Tsar, but the Minister for War could not make up his mind which military unit to assign to act as an escort for the body. Only two months now remained before the date of the unveiling. Davidov was in despair. The man who could have made things move was Yermolov, but he had been on the retired list for the past ten years and lived on his estate in the Orel Gubernia. Had Olferyev not met with his misfortune he would have been an important personage by now and would have arranged everything in one day, in one hour, in fact. But drawn by his friend Travin into the Decembrist plot, he was now with Travin languishing in Siberia. . . .

Davidov felt sad and vexed; vexed at the wrong done to Prince Peter, and sad at the lot that had befallen himself. His chest was torn by a hacking cough. He felt as if stones were pressing against the small of his back. Idle grief wearied him, and weariness from inaction grieved him.

"You are alive, but you feel that your body is cooling," he whispered to himself, gazing through the window on to the road. "When it gets quite cold it will be the end!"

He felt a gnawing pain at the pit of the stomach. His sides became numbed. He coughed loudly with the sound of exploding gunpowder. He felt that he was suffocating. He wanted to call his servant to bring him his pipe, but he had no strength to do so. He waved his arm in disgust and weariness and drawing his old greatcoat which served him as a dressing gown around him he sank heavily into his armchair near the fireside.

* * *

An old half blind horse was proceeding along a familiar lane at a sharp trot, splashing mud far and wide with its hoofs. On it was mounted a huge, grey-haired rider wearing a faded Hussar's forage cap and singing in a husky bass voice:

Oh, a grave lies in the bracken
Swept by the wind.
Cease thy howling dreadful wind
So that my bones won't blacken.

Tsioma struck his horse with his whip, felt the bag of books and letters which he was carrying from the post station and resumed his singing. He had grown accustomed to the simple duties he performed for the General from whom he had not parted once all these twenty-seven years. He had become so attached to him that he could not imagine how he could live a single day without him. And he had become equally attached to Verkhnaya Maza, so much so that he recalled his native village only in his songs. Even in his old age Tsioma's risibility was as lively as ever, except that he did not splutter without provocation as he had done before and did not laugh with the same thunderous roar. He just snorted like a horse and chuckled. And so he chuckled now as he trotted along looking around him. An old fisherman was spreading his net beyond the reeds. On catching sight of Tsioma he called out, grinning and showing his toothless gums:

"How d'ye do, old timer!"

Tsioma politely returned the greeting and chuckled. Some peasant children were on the river bank, placing pots to catch lobsters. On seeing Tsioma, they cried out in chorus with evident delight:

"Uncle Tsioma! Uncle Tsioma!"

The old Hussar winked at them and laughed heartily. Behind a wattle fence a watermill was turning noisily. Carts loaded with sacks were standing under the willows that were drooping over the pond. The peasants near the carts respectfully greeted Tsioma.

"Good day, friends!" barked Tsioma, and his whiskers stood on end with laughter.

On reaching the mansion the old Hussar reined in his horse, quickly dismounted, stretched himself a bit and hastened through the dark porch to the General.

"Here it is at last! Thank God!"

Among the letters Davidov received was one from the Chief of Staff of the 6th Infantry Corps reporting that the Kiev Hussar's Regiment had been detailed to escort the body of Prince Bagrattion to Borodino. The Ministry for War had assigned the sum necessary to cover the expenses and had already transferred it to Davidov. The General had been granted the honour of taking charge of the ceremony. The Regiment would leave Yuriev Polsky on July 6 and arrive in Mozhaisk on July 23, after covering three hundred and eleven versts in seventeen marches.

Tears dropped from Davidov's eyes and rolled down his flabby, sallow cheeks.

"Prince! Beloved hero! My eternal benefactor!" he exclaimed. "How else can a living mortal prove his devotion to the memory of the dead? Of all the epitaphs that have ever been inscribed on famous soldiers' graves there is none more eloquent than the one at Thermopylae: 'Wayfarer, tell our Motherland that we died fighting for her.' These words. . . ."

He rose from his chair and stretched out his hand to take up a pen, but his hand dropped on the desk, and he himself slowly sank and collapsed sideways on the arm-rest of the chair. He emitted a hoarse rattle, his lustreless eyes bulged from their sockets. He breathed loudly and convulsively for several seconds and then his breath came more and more slowly and softly. A stroke. After it came death.